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MICHAEL DEMPSEY

All the Colors:

Bertrand Tavernier Talks about *Round Midnight*

With *Round Midnight,* Bertrand Tavernier has made a fiction feature about jazz musicians without false picturesque details or corkscrewy melodramatic plotting. Meandering and eddying like the curls and backflows of a developing jazz improvisation, the film chronicles the West Bank Parisian existence that so many black American jazzmen, fleeing homegrown racism, poverty, and neglect, took up during after World War II and throughout the 1950s. Instead of the floating party presented in *Paris Blues,* all glamorous romances, tempestuous artistic crises, and the usual tourist attractions, or *Les Liaisons Dangereuses,* which (to quote Pauline Kael)) "uses jazz and Negroes and sex all mixed together in a cheap and sensational way that, I assume, is exotic for the French," *Round Midnight* shows these expatriates existing in a continuous orbit between the stages of tiny *boîtes* like the legendary Blue Note and a series of drab, characterless hotels. In these clubs, they swim in their self-generated seas of sounds usually lost even as they loft forth, except in the dimming memories of each night's small bands of aficionados or on an occasional bootleg recording. In the hotels, they sit torpidly, drink, cook Southern-style when they can find the ingredients, exchange occasional gnomic remarks, wait out the leaden hours until the next set.

Tavernier and David Rayfiel (a frequent collaborator, not always screen-credited, of Sydney Pollack and the co-writer of Tavernier's *Death Watch*) have fictionalized material mainly from the experiences of bebop pianist Bud Powell, who eventually succumbed to the stresses of the life, and commercial artist Francis Paudras, whose love of jazz led him to befriend Powell and at least slow down his decline. Their protagonist is tenor saxophonist Dale Turner (played by real-life jazz veteran Dexter Gordon), his guardian angel Francis Borier (François Cluzet), but the trajectory remains the same: a late-in-the-day reflowering of music and humanity before the final fall.

The movie's grip and eloquence arise chiefly from Gordon's mesmerizing presence—his lolling walk that continually threatens to send his 6'5" frame tottering to earth like a felled tree; a gluey, sandpapery voice whose range of low rasps speaks every instant of both a longing for release and a mulish determination to hang on some more. Taking his cue from this poetic hulk, Tavernier keeps exposition about his past to a minimum, focusing on the tones and crosscurrents of the moment instead. For instance, he never spells out the relationship Dale once had with much younger, dazzlingly beautiful singer Darcy Lee (Lonette McKee) but, rather, concentrates on the heady outpourings of regret-tinged but perfect happiness that burst radiantly from their scenes (one of them a rendition of George and Ira Gershwin's "How Long Has This Been Going On?").

François Cluzet (who manages to resemble both the young François Truffaut and Robert De Niro) is also riveting as the starry-eyed self-appointed keeper of Dale's flame. Under his ministrations, as Paudras has done, Dale escapes, at least for an unexpected time, his prison of depression, alcoholism, and heroin, finding fresh outlets for the courtly, lyrical side of his nature, not to mention some fellow-feeling, the renewal of his composing, and a few decent paydays. But the film also shows how Francis's passion for jazz makes him inattentive to his vulnerable young daughter Berangère (Gabrielle Haker) and piercingly cruel to his estranged wife Sylvie (actress-writer-director Christine Pascal, another frequent Tavernier collaborator, particularly on *Spoiled Children*).

Round Midnight works to present what Dale calls "all the colors" of jazz yet remains intent upon nuances of sorrow and human weakness that not even perfect creative fulfillment can assuage indefinitely. This element surfaces most

Dexter Gordon and director Bertrand Tavernier discuss a scene in ROUND MIDNIGHT

poetically when François, his daughter, and Dale visit the seaside and the film stunningly cuts from its heretofore cramped spaces to aerated vistas of sky, beach, and ocean. Lying back and gazing upward, Dale slowly croaks, "It's funny how the world is inside of nothing. Your heart and soul are inside of you. Babies are inside of their mothers. The fish are in the water. But the world is inside of nothing." The film, finally, is a tribute to the commingled gaity and sadness of all attempts to fill up that void.

Round Midnight reportedly began its road to the screen when Martin Scorsese introducted Tavernier and producer Irwin Winkler (whose credits include, along with Scorsese's *New York, New York* and *Raging Bull,* the *Rocky* films, *The Gambler,* and *The Right Stuff*). Warner Bros. put up the budget of approximately $3 million, partly at the behest, one story has it, of Clint Eastwood, who is a jazz enthusiast. Scorsese closed the circle by portraying the owner of a New York club where Dale Turner plays out his last days, adding his own distinctive brand of motormouth New York spritz to the movie's array of notes. What follows comes from an interview done (in English) on October 15, 1986, when Tavernier was in Los Angeles on a promotional visit.

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A note runs through the movie: beauty is connected with pain. The usual idea is that a vision of beauty is a barrier against pain. Here it is not, and not because the music is neglected or there are no financial rewards for those who play the jazz. It's that playing the jazz itself causes them pain at the same time that it gives them ecstasy.

Yes, exactly, exactly. And sometimes adoring jazz, understanding it deeply, causes the same thing.

What is Francis's real nature? In particular, what is his condition at the end of the movie, when he is watching films of his friend that he shot and it's several years later? I had the impression that he might be lost and unable to recover himself.

Francis for me is a very important character. First, because he allows the audience to ap-

proach Dale Turner in an impressionistic way. So sometimes without even realizing it, the audience sees Dale from his point of view, from his emotions. And I think you are projecting Francis's emotions or reactions upon Dale. For me, it's not only a balance, but I think that a lot of people don't realize that without Francis the emotion would never be the same. And the other thing about Francis is—I wanted the character to have some dark side. I didn't want to tell just the story of a friendship, just the story about someone rescuing another. I wanted to show the selfish side of people who want to save the world. And I wanted to show that sometimes the communication was difficult, and sometimes are they even really communicating, Dale and Francis? In the last scene with Francis, I wanted him to be partly the cause of Dale's death, unconsciously. By taking him to his parents, to Lyons, taking him in his family, he makes Dale aware, very aware, that he is an exile, that he is cut from his roots, and he provokes that need to come back. I even had a line, a thing which I shot, just before the Lyons concert. Francis was saying, "I think I should not have had him brought back to New York." And I felt it was too much of an explanation, so I cut it. The last scene between Francis and his daughter was improvised on the set. When she says, "I'm going out," and then she comes back. I wanted to show that at the same time that he was maybe more mature, he was left with all those memories, and he had never completely thought of her. And I wanted to show that, in a way, Berangère was more mature than he, was helping him. It's true that Francis has made a step towards her, he went to her. But he's still caught in a story. And she comes to him. I wanted that. She comes to him to give him tenderness, to tell him that it's not over. I mean, Dale is still alive. The image is still there. The sound is still there. It's why I wanted the voice-over of Dale at the last scene. The lines were not in the script. At the end of the shoot, I went to the studio with Dexter, and I made him talk about certain things, some of which I used at the end in the sound track. And then . . . I had written something which he had told me one day. "I hope that one day there will be—"

The parks and the streets named after great jazz musicians.

Dexter Gordon as saxophonist Dale Turner

He did it. He recorded it. And I suddenly asked him, without preparing it, I said to him, "What about Dale Turner?" And he looked at me, surprised, but immediately he said, "Maybe a street called Dale Turner." And I said, "My God, I will cut my questions," and I had the ending.

One reason it's perfect is because when he's saying "I hope we'll all live long enough" to see that, he himself is no longer with us.

Yes, yes, yes.

In addition to which, we still don't have those streets and those parks.

Yes. This is exactly the problem which I wanted to get at. In a way, I can relate to the passion of Francis. When I was a press agent, I had the same relationship that he has with Dale Turner, I had it with people like John Ford. When I took care of John Ford, when we had him come into Paris. In those first days—not at the end, he was perfect at the end—but those first days he was really drinking a lot. To the point that we had to sleep in the same hotel room to take care of him. So when Francis Paudras told me the story of his relationship with Bud, I could very, very, very much relate

to that. I had lived several times that innocence. The scene when Francis tells Dale how much he loves him and he loves his music, and Dale says, "Do you have enough money to buy me another beer?"—it's based on one of the meetings between Bud and Francis. But at the same time, I experienced the same thing with Ford. When I told John Ford how much I love his work and had been talking about *The Sun Shines Bright, She Wore a Yellow Ribbon, My Darling Clementine, the Searchers, Young Mr. Lincoln,* we were talking a little like Francis in the picture, and he said, "Do you think I could get a B & B [Benedictine and brandy]?" "My God," we said . . . We had the same reaction as Francis—surprise, disappointment, and it was very easy for me to relate to that kind of emotion. Francis has a very French, romantic, naive, and passionate attitude toward Dale. He loves him, and he respects him. And Dale always has a way of cutting him. And I liked that.

There are moments when you just want to come out and say it. You don't want to be oblique or subtle.

Yes, exactly, exactly that, sure. And Francis Paudras several times told me that he had had the same experience with Bill Evans. One day he was with him in a car, and he had, like, three minutes to communicate something. You cannot be oblique in those moments. And, too, it's not the *way* of the character to be oblique. The people who love the films, they will go directly to somebody and say, "I love your work." So I had a big discussion with David Rayfiel about that. David is a wonderful oblique writer. But sometimes not everybody has to be oblique. David is great for making a love scene where people say "I love you" in talking about matches and . . . I don't know, the grass or things like that. He wrote beautiful scenes like that. But maybe there is a moment, sometimes, where the people have to say, "I love you." David would even have a problem writing a scene with somebody asking for eggs and bacon. He would like to find a subtle way. And I found the same thing with the scene with the wife [when Francis tries to borrow money from Sylvie to move himself, Berangère, and Dale into a roomier apartment]. David was thinking that the scene was telling the audience that Dale is great. And I was saying, "No, David, it's a very violent scene." It's somebody who is so childish and immature that he is telling the woman whom I think he still loves that he has never been inspired by her. So he *hurts* her all the time during that scene. And I think the scene is very, very, very important because it brings out the dark side of the character. Which I think doesn't make him less likable or interesting.

In a way, it ties in with what Dale says: "Music is my life, music is my love, and it's 24 hours a day." That's a heavy sentence to face. It's like something that will not turn off and will not let go of you.

Yes, and I think it's completely true of all the jazz musicians of the period, completely true. Maybe that story of friendship and passion is more related to the jazz musicians. I don't know that anything like that happened in rock-and-roll. Maybe because the other kind of music is more the music of the establishment. It's a music where people are making lots of money, where in jazz, the people were not making lots of money. They were outside of the system. And I still think that the bebop is the only part of the American music which has never been recuperated, swallowed, by the system. I mean, Broadway has used the blues, has used Fats Waller, Duke Ellington. They took everything.

The way the numbers are shot, there are rest periods in the middle of them with little bits of byplay and behavior between the musicians. Instead of playing, Dale will sit and rest for a minute, or he'll look at a drink and try to get it, and there will be looks passing back and forth between them. Rock-and-roll wouldn't allow for such a thing. I thought that was one of the most effective aspects of the film.

We were determining a certain number of [camera] positions, because we never knew where we were going in the numbers because jazz is so much an improvisation. So we had, like, 12 positions, and when I was watching the numbers, I was behind the grip and the operator, and I was saying [whispers] "5 . . . 4 . . . 3 . . . 2 . . . ." And we were constantly moving.

Were you shooting with only one camera?

Two cameras. And I always said that I wanted to use the movement. So they were trying to make the movements smooth and fast. And then suddenly I would say, "Pan on the

Herbie Hancock (who composed, arranged, and conducted the score) as Eddie Wayne in ROUND MIDNIGHT

drummer, on Billy . . .'' And I wanted to get a lot of shots of the people listening. There is, I think, a wonderful shot of Billy Higgins during ''Body and Soul.'' You see that he is listening to Dale. And you see that he is thinking a lot of things: ''Well, Dale may be a little bit out of shape. I hope he will make it, but he went into a kind of adventurous course. Will he go until the end? What kind of note is he going to hit? I *want* him to play that.'' You feel that he wants to help, that he's interested, surprised, pleased, and at the same time that he would like to be there to *help.* So he's changing his drums, he's thinking of something else, and he's waiting for the note. We were able to get those kinds of scenes because we recorded live.

I want to ask a couple of things about the audience. For example, the shot of the man who seems to be surreptitiously recording the sets . . .

That's the real Francis Paudras. I mean, certain jazz fans did record the music during a set, and it's how a lot of pirate records appeared. And the bad side is that sometimes the musicians were not paid. The good side [is that] certain records got moments which were incredible, the moments that sometimes you don't get in an album, where somebody in a club suddenly has a wonderful night and a wonderful solo. And I wanted to show that because I've seen that all the time, people recording. And sometimes with bad sound. I mean, you have an album of Lester [Young] or Charlie Parker where you hear the forks, you hear more the noise of the club than the music. But still some of them are very interesting. The audience, well . . . we chose only jazz fans. I mean, some people came from the South of France to be in the movie. We had a teacher who took his holiday to be there at Epinay, the studio, for two weeks during the shooting. We had some musicians. We had the wife and the daughter of Charlie Parker in the crowd. I had the son of Kenny Clarke. I had some jazz critics. I had people who were at the Blue Note at the time. And I wanted them to listen, to *really* listen, to the music. And when they do things, mark the tempo, that they are right. Because a lot of times in movies, they will be either overdoing or completely out of tempo, out of the beat. So I wanted that to be very precise and noticed. I mean, the extras in some of the films about jazz are absolutely dreadful. I mean, the way they act. They are moving and acting and pretending to be excited, overdoing it like nobody does in a club. In clubs like the Blue Note, people were not dancing, they were listening. In *Paris Blues,* you see people dancing to New Orleans music, Dixieland music, but not to bebop. And they never know what is the style of the music. So they are mixing Ellington, Armstrong, swing, New Orleans. So the musi-

Dexter Gordon as Dale Turner, Sandra Reeves-Turner as Buttercup, François Cluzet as Francis Borier: ROUND MIDNIGHT

cians always refer to the music but never to a style, never to a real thing. I mean, I never knew what kind of music Paul Newman was writing in *Paris Blues,* or Sidney Poitier. Was it Dixieland? Was it an Ellington type of arrangement? Was it Stan Kenton? He says, "I would like to write a piece of important music."

Which means nothing.

Nothing. It's absurd.

At one point, you pan from Francis to a very beautiful woman, who's also listening very intently. If this were another kind of movie, their eyes wold meet, and something would start to develop between them, and this would be woven into an elaborate plot that would become involved with the jazz and the musicians and everything.

[Laughs] No, I wanted that kind of thing where nothing happens, just people listening. Because I've noticed, especially people who are the real fans, they don't communicate. They are there, they are lost. Especially in that number, which was very emotional, "Body and Soul." I felt it was much more moving that way.

The musicians seem to be in their own individual world, yet still attentive to the other musicians. But they're not that concerned with playing directly to the audience.

Yeah, because if they are well together, they immediately admit that the audience will get it. It's very, very strange, the relationship between the bebop musicians and [audiences]. *Except* a few people like Dizzy Gillespie, who really try to have a lot of fun with the audience. Bobby [Hutcherson, who plays in the film's Blue Note band] told me a wonderful story. It explained the attitude of the musicians. George Coleman was always practicing his own scales, and he was repeating them on the stage. And Miles [Davis] got very angry and said, "I don't want you to discover something alone. You have to share that with the audience, and you have to discover it when the audience is there, not when you are alone." And that's very important. You have to discover things when the others are there and the audience is there. It's a real confrontation. And in a way, they are closer to some classical musicians. They think the audience is mature enough to be able to catch that. But at the same time, they were demanding and they were challenging each other.

A question has arisen a few times: "Dexter Gordon is really playing himself, isn't he?" It doesn't seem to me that he is. I was struck by the way when he was trying to get his money directly he says, "I've been straight enough to play my axe . . . and sweetly." *That's incredible, and it's obviously acting.*

Yes, it is. The word "sweetly" was something he added. First, I think a lot of the great actors and stars are bringing a lot of themselves in the part. I don't mean their ideas or that but their

way of speaking or behaving. I mean, Cooper, Wayne, Bogart—they have their way of delivering the lines. Jean Gabin. In a way, Dexter is like that, and he has a way of speaking which is very special. The other thing is Dexter was never, never somebody who could be controlled as easily as Dale Turner. He was always a charmer, always a ladies' man. He had certain moments of his life which are similar to Dale Turner's. He had downs, he had moments where he would destroy himself, he had a lot of things like that.

He lived that hotel room life?

Yes, he had that, but you cannot imagine Dexter being locked up in a room like that or anybody controlling Dexter. I know that. We spent 15, 16 weeks together, and it's very, very difficult to control him. We had once or twice some problems with him. I mean, he has his own mind, he knows what he's doing, he has a way of imposing what he wants, which is not Dale Turner. In the other way, Dexter is very, very sharp, very intelligent, and he's acting in life all the time. Like in the scene that you mentioned, I had a big argument with him, a big discussion, because he wanted to slap Sandra Reeves-Phillips, the woman playing Buttercup [a jazz singer who serves as a kind of den mother to the musicians]. He said, "I have to take revenge on her. I have to knock her down." And I had one hour of discussion with him trying to show that it was not in line with the character. And he said, "Yes, but me, I would slap her." I said, "You don't need it." When I was arguing, I said to him, "Dexter, do you think that Gary Cooper would hit a woman?" And he thought for a while, and he said, "No." And it's how I got the scene. The whole idea of the character is based on something that Thelonious Monk said at the end of his life, when he was asked to play at Carnegie and was being given a lot of money, and he turned that down, and he said, "It's too late. I'm tired of trying to convince people."

When Dale says to the psychiatrist, "I'd really like to rest. I'm tired of everything except the music," I thought that he meant, "I'd like to rest permanently. I'd like to die. I wish I could be tired of the music, too."

Yes, that was the idea. And *that* is something in the character which is not at all in Dexter. Not at all. Because Dexter is a survivor. Dexter is somebody who is surprising everybody by the way he's coming back all the time. The biggest fight I had with any actor in my life was with François Cluzet, because François was so much in admiration for Dexter when we had those two or three crises. Which were difficult but, after all, I think they even helped the film, and they are nothing compared to the moments of pleasure and happiness and great emotion that we had on the set. But there was one moment when Dexter was really completely exhausted, and the film was bringing back bad memories, and he was in bad shape. And François was so distressed that he was doing the same thing. François started to drink. We began to be worried, because François was *so* much in his part, and a lot of people of the crew began to say, "When he will be in New York and the characters have to separate, that will be very, very difficult. I don't know if we're going to be able to get him back." And I had a one-hour fight on the street. He kept saying, "This is the greatest love story, which I'm leaving" and "The man is dying in front of me." I said, "Look, Dexter is not dying, Dexter is a survivor, Dexter in four years from now will be recording a new album, and *you* will be in the gutter." After all that, François was absolutely perfect and great. But the film was incredibly emotional to shoot, because the frontier between life and fiction was always completely thin. At the same time, at certain moments we were in fiction, and suddenly we were getting right into life. And at certain moments when we were thinking, "Oh, this is life," Dexter had a way of *playing* an action or having a line which put us back where we started, making a movie. He had an *incredible* attitude for that, which I have seen only with some great, great actors, like Phillipe Noiret. We shot the scene when he wants to get paid, and then about two or three weeks after, we did the shot where he has been paid and he waves the wallet. And suddenly I heard during the take, "I have been paid direct, like anybody." He has used the line which he has said [in the earlier scene] without telling me. That was a very good dramatic effect. I would have liked to have written that line, and so would David. That's very, very good thinking. He has an incredible memory. And he's a little bit like Robert Mitchum. He seems always a little bit away, dozing, his eyes closed, away from

the scene in which he is, and then suddenly he will surprise you, because three months later he will tell you *exactly* what happened during the scene. And that's the way he survived, I think, the way he protected himself, because I talked to people who knew him and said he was exactly like that 20 years ago, exactly.

None of the characters expresses any racism; they don't even seem to be thinking of it. Was this characteristic of French society in general or just this particular world?

I think it's completely true. It was very true of what was around the jazz musicians at that time in France. James Baldwin even wrote that there is racism in France, but you don't have any racism on the Left Bank. If I had put the story in '49 or '50, I could have shown Lester or Don Byas arriving in France and being surprised (that was told to me by several witnesses) that they could go in by the main door. The problem was that in '59 [when the film is set] I could not make such a statement. The other thing is, I talked to a lot, *a lot,* of musicians about Lester, and they were never mentioning [racism], never. Sometimes Lester was talking about it, like I have in the film where Dale talks to the camera about the Army. But never with self-pity, with some humor in it. It was not part of their discussion. Maybe because they knew it too much and didn't have to talk about it. The only thing that Lester said was that he had done *D. B. Blues, Detention Barracks Blues,* and that was his revenge upon those racists. I used one or two lines which are typically Lester. At the beginning, when Dale says, "No cold eyes in Paris," that means no racists in Paris. But there was no more than that. In a way, for me, it's stronger. I had thought of putting in some lines. I even recorded Dexter speaking about his first tour in the South in the forties, when he arrived in a city in the South for the first time, and the driver asked somebody where is the colored bar. He said it was a shock for him, because he was from Los Angeles and his father was a doctor. When I tried to get that in the film, that looked like, "OK, I forgot to speak about it. I'm bringing in a few lines about it." I *hate* to have scenes where a character is explaining to another character something that the other character should know. Like "You can come now through the main door." They know it. I'm sure that Dale Turner has come

Martin Scorsese as Woodley, owner of Birdland (left)

several times to Paris. He knows it. In '59, everybody knew it. In a lot of films, you have explanations which are designed for the audience but not for the character. We tried to avoid that. And again—this is something important—I think the same way that in the jazz the notes that the people don't play are as important as the notes that they play, the lines which are not there are as important as the lines which are there.

I want to bring up a possible relationship between Dale Turner and the painter in A Sunday in the Country. *It's the only film I've seen about an artist who may be a failure and seems to consider himself one, partly because his work has gone out of fashion but also because he feels that he has become a perfectly competent sort of painter but not one of the great people who blaze new frontiers. This seems like another example of the link between pain and beauty.*

I think the two characters are very much related, although they are the opposites. One didn't dare enough, maybe, and the other went maybe too far. In fact, the emotions are exactly the same, the fears are the same. Whatever you were not bold enough, or even if you were very brave or innovative, you always have the same fear, you always have the same obsession that maybe you didn't go far enough, maybe you could have done it better, that you did only part of what you should have done. They are two films which are based on, I would say, a musical storyline. I asked Bruno de Keyser to do a photography which would be closer to the *film noir,* closer to the work of people like John Alton. The color, the design, the mood is the

opposite. [But] the way that the camera is trying to work in it, to move to build certain emotions, for me is exactly the same. Whether the camera is trying to move for me is always related with music and with the emotion of the character more than with the movement of the character.

It seems as though, contrary to some other movies about jazz, you can't really make a jazz film and also have an elaborate plot. You must get rid of the plot so you can fill all that space up with details that are analogous to what the musicians create with the music.

Exactly. And I think because the life and the emotion of the musicians are a challenge, in a sense, to plots. They have a life which is so based on emotion that any conventional storyline is reducing the emotion, is reducing the true spirit. You have to be completely free in terms of writing and directing, completely free. For instance, for me, a film like *Children of a Lesser God,* which everybody seems to admire very much, has a very conventional plot. Very, very old fashioned. I mean, it's like an old-fashioned play of the thirties a little brought up to date. Well acted, very well acted.

David Rayfiel did some work on Out of Africa, *a $30 some-odd million big studio prestige Academy Award winner that does not have a plot.*

Yeah. It's true, but I mean, that's great. It's one of the qualities of David sometimes. *Jeremiah Johnson,* which he wrote lots for, has the same quality. Very often, people I think are making a mistake between plot and story, between what should be synopses of the plot and what is really in the film. And that *very* strong belief in some American critics and even in part of the audience, in which they approach the screenplay as a stage play. And very often I've heard things like, "In this film you don't have the third act." Or "The first act is brilliant." In the films which I admire, from *The Grapes of Wrath* to *The Sun Shines Bright, My Darling Clementine, The Rules of the Game, La Grande Illusion, Casque d'Or, The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*—I can name a thousand films—I wonder, "Where are the acts?" I mean, if they were asking me, I would *never* know it. But even in the *teaching* in schools . . . I mean, I've been to Sundance, and I've heard a lot of writers talking about that: "You don't have a first act." *Where* is the first act? I don't know. [But] it's not only now. I think it's a very old belief. Which is never true. I mean, you would never have Michael Powell, never have Jean Renoir, Jean Grémillon, Jean Vigo talking about acts. Or [Luigi] Comencini. Never. Never. They would talk in terms of fluidity. They would talk in terms of construction. And sometimes I've seen certain critics puzzled by films by [Maurice] Pialat, [Jacques] Doillon, or by *A Week's Vacation* because they don't see a construction, which means a real progression where people go from A to B to C to D. I still believe very much for me that film is very, very close to music, and it should have the same construction, with counterpoint, with a melody which has a counterpoint behind, or a variation. Like a fugue. The films which are done like a kind of chronicle, like a series of moments—like Dos Passos, let's say—with breakings, different stories, getting them together . . . a little less now, but they seem to puzzle a lot of people. They say, "There is not much of a plot." I know that on *A Week's Vacation* I worked very, very hard, and I think in its genre that screenplay and that film are completely, completely successful. And I think that a person who would talk about not finding a plot there, they do not see what the film is about. They do not understand that you can have things which are giving you the impression that you are seeing moments of the life of somebody or a series of emotions. I mean, a construction closer to impressionism, closer to music than to a stage play. On the other hand, I have found *always* that a lot of plays admired in this country—let's say Arthur Miller—are deadly boring because they are so staged, so built, and so obsessed by construction that I see the mechanics but I don't see any inspiration, any language. I mean, Tennessee Williams is much more interesting than Arthur Miller even if the plays sometimes are not so well built. They are built through poetry, through language, through lyricism, where Arthur Miller is like having two ideas which are repeated over for five or six hours. In fact—it's true of France, too—you have a certain type of critic or audience who like the screenplay to give the impression that they are intelligent and that they have understood certain deep things about subjects which are important. And they feel, "My

God, I'm quite bright." I mean, a lot of films have that kind of attitude. I like films which puzzle you a little bit. I like *Leo the Last,* by [John] Boorman, where you don't know what to make out of it. I think it's a supermasterpiece, it's a great, great film, great film. I like *Badlands,* which I think is a very important film. At the same time, when I see a film like *The Color of Money,* I say, "My God, I would like one day to be able to do that kind of very, very beautiful demonstration of what direction is about." The good films, at the same time they inspire you and they make you feel very, very modest. I know that certain directors say that it's depressing to see a film which is so great because you feel that you will never do it. I don't feel at all like that. Yesterday, after seeing *The Color of Money,* I immediately wanted to start to work on a film set again and try to see if I could do as well in certain things.

LYNDA K. BUNDTZEN

Monstrous Mothers

Medusa, Grendel, and now Alien

Will there be a sequel to *Aliens*? Its depiction of female fecundity, prolific and devouring, is so powerful and fictively generative, it would be hard for an equally profit-hungry movie industry to resist another visitation by the Alien Mama and her spawn. The Company in *Aliens* certainly seems eager for the monster's survival. In both the original *Alien* and the current sequel, a sleazy Company man (actually an android in *Alien*), stirred by the profit-motive, is engaged in nefarious dirty tricks to return an alien embryo to the Company's labs on earth. The lingering question at the end of *Aliens* is whether, in fact, the Company man Burke has succeeded—whether the figures encapsuled in space-sleep for the return journey harbor an Alien embryo. The image of sleeping beauties and heroines Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) and the young girl she saves, Newt (Carrie Henn), is disquieting. The Alien is an elusive, slippery parasite, with incredible ability to pop up and out of the most unlikely places. The last Alien appearance in this film occurs after the space ship leaves the infected planet. Just when the audience believes all danger is past—following what seemed to be a final harrowing escape by Ripley and Newt—the android Bishop is pierced through his belly by what first looks like an Alien birth and is then revealed to be the Alien Mama herself. She has somehow managed to maneuver her dragon's girth undetected on to the departing space ship, and roars into life for a final showdown with Ripley. With this improbable return after the story seemed to have climaxed, an unsteady audience may well wonder if the film's ingenious writer-director James Cameron hasn't still another ending in mind, and if not ends, sequels.

Within the thematic structure of the narrative, however, there are even more compelling reasons to expect the Alien's eternal return. The disquietude we may feel gazing at the virginal sleep of Ripley and her foster daughter Newt is a result, I believe, of our intuition that it disguises the potential threat they apparently have defeated and escaped. Narrative instability is reinforced cinematically in the camera's final dissolve from a medium shot of the sleeping Ripley and Newt to a close-up that invites a quizzical inspection from the audience: what are we looking for in these ostensibly peaceful figures? Defeat and escape from the female and Alien other is, I will show, only provisional and temporary. *Aliens,* I will argue, is a profoundly disturbing allegory about contemporary feminism, and it is far from resolving the issues it explores about woman's nature vs. her culture-making aspirations.

The heroine of *Aliens* is no feminist ideo-

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logue, but surely an exemplary figure for women in her rugged independence, cool courage under fire, and resourcefulness. In both *Alien* and *Aliens,* Ripley is characterized as fighting male bias against women doing the kind of work she does and shown asserting both her authority (in *Alien* she is the ship's security officer) and her right to command men with less intelligence and nerve. Physically, she is a rangy six-footer, agile and strong, and demonstrably capable of any swashbuckling feats performed by male heroes. In *Aliens,* though, she is further endowed with a more traditionally feminine trait: her loving, maternal nurturance of the young girl, Newt. Newt (a nickname I will return to later) is the sole survivor of the Alien's annihilation of an entire colony of humans sent by the Company to exploit the resources of an unpopulated planet. This relationship between Ripley and Newt has inspired a feminist sentimentality that diverts attention from the film's menacing depiction of female sexuality in the Alien.

Who or what is the Alien? Ripley's foe is a primal mother defined solely by her devouring jaws and her prolific egg-production. As her eggs open, presumably triggered by the presence of a human host, they splat (I can think of no better word here) on the face of a victim. This intermediate Alien form resembles female genitalia, surrounded by crab legs and a long whip-like tail. The tail wraps around the victim's throat and chokes the host's mouth open for oral rape. When, for example, Ripley struggles with one of the lab specimens, the monster's tail is wound tightly around her neck, choking Ripley's mouth open for embryo implantation. From a vaginal cavity, a penis-like finger juts into the throat and implants an alien embryo deep into the viscera of a host. This vagina *cum* penis appears when a lab specimen darts furiously at its glass enclosure, and we see a little finger poking out of a slit. This fusion of male and female sexual organs does not make Aliens androgynous. The monster's femininity is confirmed by the vulva and labia which surround the slit—a graphic display of female anatomy—and an incident between the android Bishop and another marine. Bishop is studying a dead Alien specimen, carefully tweezing aside the folds of flesh around the vaginal opening, when another marine lewdly comments, "I think it likes you."

After an initial struggle with this smothering Alien form, the host endures embryo implantation and gestation in a death-like sleep. The crab-like structure falls off the face, and at least in *Alien,* the host has a brief waking spell of seeming normality. The embryo, however, has developed a large head with extraordinary jaws and finally gnaws its way out in a violent Caesarean birth that destroys its human host. In *Alien* singular, only one monster is born. The other members of Ripley's first crew are presumably devoured by the Alien, who grows larger with each human morsel. The opening of *Alien* shows, however, a landscape of eggs ready to adopt human hosts, and in *Aliens,* the colonists have wandered into this no-man's land (the result, we learn from Ripley's investigations, of Burke's treacherous orders). Despite Aliens' voracity, many colonists have not yet been eaten. Homing devices implanted in the colonists' bodies lead the rescue squad to where they have been captured instead for hosting eggs. I cannot help but reflect here that the Aliens' self-replication must be limited by the food and/or host supply, but laying eggs seems to be an imperative superseding any consideration of what is available for sustenance. Perhaps the Alien Mama surmises humans' ambivalent attraction and repulsion to her dangers.[1]

Fighting Aliens poses innumerable hazards. Their scuttling speed and wraparound tails are comprehensible dangers. In addition, however, they have mysterious bodily fluids and several retractable jaws nesting inside one another. Shooting an Alien results in spurts of Alien "blood." This blood is acid and it sears through everything—flesh, bone, plastic, steel. If one must shoot them, then, it should be at a considerable distance and without fear of acid-damage to one's environment. A better strategy is to burn them with flame-throwers, and this is the technique Ripley eventually uses to great advantage in the penultimate confrontation with the Alien Mama. The jaws of Aliens seem to have an immobilizing, hypnotic effect on their victims, or at least their opening jaws are punctuated by lengthy reaction shots, suggesting a resemblance to the Medusa's paralysis of her victims.[2] Aliens' jaws are gooey, secreting a vis-

Sigourney Weaver as Ripley, Carrie Hehn as Newt, in ALIENS

cous fluid that cocoons human beings in a spider-like web for future egg-implantation. The secretions of the Big Mama Alien also seem eventually to harden into a vast network of hatcheries. One final bit of Alien lore: in *Alien* the monster is described by the robot scientist as "biologically a perfect creature" and invulnerable to human technology. Its strength assures escape from any kind of prison created by human ingenuity and its jaws assure penetration of any fortress. Neither capture nor defense is possible and both films end with

flight. But Aliens are no longer invulnerable in the sequel, where a few lab specimens are suspended quietly in large test tube vats and many are blown apart or resisted by grenade blasts and fire power.

The Alien Mama's mucilaginous "art work" is an organic colossus. Its reticulated curves (resembling ribs) and labyrinthine structure contrast visually with the severity of plastic, steel, and glass environs, the grid-like regularity of lines that dominates the man-made interiors of space ships, shuttles, and complexes in this futuristic world. Youthful Aliens are embedded in this structure, and when disturbed, drop like roaches out of the woodwork. There appears, in fact, to be no outside to this inside, no perspective from which to see the enemy Alien whole and distinct. There's a disturbing sense in which the Alien's polymorphous body lacks integrity and identity. The technological environment is, much of the time, as dark and maze-like as the Alien's and spatial orientation for the viewer is nearly impossible, adding to the confusion and terror of not knowing where one is in relation to the Alien. Despite this frequently greasy-machinery appearance, the shine of technology seems somehow clean, even antiseptic in its freedom from the Alien's wastes and slime. When the marine rescue squad in *Aliens* first enters the area of the space station taken over by Aliens, they are utterly baffled by the way everything has been gooed, webbed, slimed and altered in shape and design. The colonists trapped in Alien Mama's art work also bear disconcerting resemblance to dusty religious icons, the first a dangling cruciform, another web-hooded and lit like a Madonna—as if we have wandered into a perverse Alien shrine. The marines feel at home with plastic, metal, glass, but are utterly bewildered when they arrive at this womb-tomb, an organic and female interior. Finally, it is significant that the arrival of an Alien is often preceded by silence and then the sound of dripping water, as opposed to the buzzers, guns, welding torches, and clicking machines which are the human defense against this natural creature, motivated only by hunger and the urge to reproduce herself.

The Alien other, I believe, quite literally embodies woman's reproductive powers. She arouses primal anxieties about woman's sexual organs and in her combination of multiple tentacles and oozing jaws is the phallic mother of nightmare. The band of marines who enter her vagina, then her womb (which is also a catacomb cluttered with bony human refuse), with all their fire power and ejaculatory short bursts of guns, are ineffectual and insignificant male gametes. The marines are exaggeratedly macho, and this boastful maleness is only underscored by the female marines' adoption of butch haircuts, muscle flexing, and a swaggering that says, "I can outfight, outswear, outfuck a man any day of the week." Sexual impersonation here derides masculinity itself as an impersonation, while the Alien impersonates no one but herself. Catastrophe is first checked, then precipitated by the explosion of guns, suggesting that the male penetrates the female at considerable peril.

Only a few members of this "crack squad of commandos" survive to retreat from the Alien's labyrinth, and they are limp and unmanned by their efforts. The most macho of the males are imprisoned—the black, cigar-smoking "Sarge" and Rambo Drake who epitomizes Marine bravery in his overconfidence in superior strength and fire power. Another grunt, Hudson, who likes to flex the muscle between his ears by insulting his fellow marines, particularly the women, survives, but his male bravado turns to little-boy hysteria, abated only by Ripley's firm, "Calm down." Indeed, the only marines who emerge from Big Mama's *vagina dentata* with "frosty" aplomb are Vasquez, a fiery Chicana who knows she is tougher than her male comrades in arms, and Hicks, a "liberated" male who admires Ripley's existential guts over her femininity and eventually teaches her how to use a gargantuan rapid-fire gun.

The major confrontation of the film, in fact, will not be impotent male marines vs. Alien Big Mama, but between Ripley, a woman who practices the maternal as compassionate care vs. a biological-maternal principle of monstrous proportions, embodied in the Alien other. Ripley is a fierce protectress of Newt, promising her own death if need be to save the girl from the Alien Mama. There are three fights to save Newt, each more suggestive than the last of Ripley's maternal heroism. The first, already mentioned, occurs in the lab. Ripley and Newt

are sleeping under a bed where Newt has curled up tightly like a fetus, and Ripley gently hugs her to her tummy. Ripley awakens, realizes both that Alien lab specimens are loose and that her gun has been locked outside the lab. With Hudson and Hicks's intervention, the lab specimens are destroyed and Ripley and Newt saved from surrogate motherhod for Aliens.

The second confrontation is revelation—a face-to-face meeting of Ripley with the primal Mother Alien. Up to this moment in the film, battles with the Alien have been with Big Mama's proliferating brood, not with the dam herself. Nor has director Cameron permitted the audience a good long look at the Alien. Newt has been lost, captured by the Alien in a watery basement to the complex. Though Ripley has only fifteen minutes to retrieve Newt before a nuclear reactor explosion, she decides to return to a dark, wet netherworld where Newt's homing device (a gift from Ripley) indicates she is still alive. Ripley first finds the homing device, no longer strapped to Newt, and in her one weak moment of the film, begins to weep, believing that she has failed in her promise to save Newt. Still alive, but cocooned in the Alien's web, Newt screams, spurring Ripley to action. She pulls Newt loose and burns an opening egg. What follows is the scariest sequence of the film. Ripley and Newt (and the audience) suddenly realize that they are walking through a passage land-mined with follicles and eggs. Their first sight of Mama Alien is of her dropping another egg from a gauzy tube that extends from her belly. When they look up, an enormous Alien mother hisses back, jaws dripping and ready to strike. Initially Ripley reacts as if they have violated an animal mother's lair, quietly and calmly stepping backward, as if to say, "I won't bother you and your eggs, if you won't bother me and my child." Indeed, a nonverbal agreement is struck between these two protective mothers. The truce is broken, however, when another egg opens up and Ripley burns it. The Alien Mama screeches in fury and charges, while simultaneously, Ripley appears to have lost all control, torching every Alien egg in sight. The Alien Mama wrenches her body out of its egg-laying mode to pursue Ripley. Her polymorphic form shattered, the Alien is now a single enemy entity. This whole episode firmly establishes and sets up, for a final showdown still to come, the mother vs. mother nature of the conflict.

Ripley returns to the Alien planet for this epic confrontation, chiefly, it seems, because of traumatic nightmares about giving birth to an Alien. Early in the film, we are given images of Ripley's bulging stomach, and then we see her waking in a sweaty labor from this frightening birth. In this cinematic trick, we believe dream to be reality, and the film thereby enacts an unthinkable horror, the potential birth of Alien otherness in Ripley's body. If this is the fear she wishes to defeat in her return—a fear of giving birth—coupled with a ferocious determination to protect Newt, and defending her twice from impregnation-implantation, then *Aliens'* story pivots around a feminist *guérillère* doing battle with the premise that female anatomy is destiny. Interpretation admittedly goes somewhat wild here in its possible directions. Is Ripley as feminist opposed to man's technological colonization of woman's body—embryo implantation, *in vitro* fertilization, the cloning of babies? All of these antiscientific possibilities seem embedded in her enmity for the Alien. Except that the Alien, to this viewer, is stunningly limited by her instincts. She is juicy femaleness, nature gone wild, not technology gone awry.

What is so disturbing about this film from a feminist perspective, then, is its extreme opposition of two kinds of maternal nurture: the instinctual and biological in the Alien, and the conscious, chosen, cultural motherhood of Ripley. Ripley softens her tough, cool demeanor when she first holds Newt in her arms. Finding a photo of Newt celebrating her second-grade citizenship award, she seems shaken by the girl's violated childhood. Later, she appeals to Newt's own incipient maternal impulses, comparing her desire to assuage Newt's fears to Newt's own efforts to console her doll Casey. (Newt tells Ripley that it's not the same, since Casey is only plastic and not subject to the nightmares Newt has.) The photo of Newt also provides her real name, Rebecca, and Rebecca's neat, smiling image contrasts sharply with Newt's unkempt wild-child appearance, reminding the audience of the possible reduction to savagery if children are left motherless. The marine doctor, also a woman, examines Newt and pronounces her okay phys-

ically, but it is Ripley who washes her face, whose tenderness elicits speech. What all of this suggests in the character of Ripley is a complete dissociation of the maternal principle from woman's biology. Even the seemingly extraneous detail about Newt's plastic doll Casey suggests an artificed, manufactured, woman-made rather than woman-born principle. Ripley chooses to mother; she is not programmed as female by nature to nurture others.

Before celebrating this new feminist wisdom about mothering,[3] let me describe the showdown between Ripley and the Alien. In this final battle, Ripley is less a woman than a cyborg. She has, and it makes the audience love her, beckoned the Alien away from Newt, offering herself as maternal sacrifice: "Take me, not my girl." Ripley disappears and returns with gear that makes her a robot. Like the transformers ubiquitous in the children's toy market, Ripley is now inorganic machine, a combination crane and forklift, screaming, "Get away from her, you bitch!" After an intense battle where the Alien still seems indomitable because of her agility compared to Ripley's clumsy machinery, victory is achieved when Ripley flushes Mama out of an open hatch. I do not think it is straining analysis to see this as a technological disembodiment of the maternal principle from the female body, a feminist symbol for the repression of the female body altogether. Technology's virtue is emphasized by the android Bishop's assistance. He has only half a body left from the ravages of the Alien, yet he manages to hang on to Newt, who is nearly sucked out with the Alien into space. The other survivor, the marine Hicks, seems a more likely comrade in this fight to save humanity, but he is notably out of sight. The slight hint that Ripley-Hicks-Newt form a future nuclear family is ultimately stymied by the film's depiction of female sexuality.[4] Woman's reproductive power is conventionally sanctioned within the bounds of family. In *Aliens,* this power is displaced in the Alien Mama and therefore represented as completely out of bounds, beyond civilization's controlling institutions.

Therefore, despite a wish to praise this revision of mothering as a cultural choice—a humanizing and civilizing impulse that makes Ripley heroic—I cannot. Because simultaneously, I want to ask why the female body must be represented with such primal terror, such intense repugnance, and why it needs to be so resoundingly defeated, sucked into the vacuum of space as if thrown back into whatever imaginative void could have germinated such horror. If the terrors of the film are, as I've tried to indicate, grounded in archetypal fears of woman's otherness, her alien body and its natural functions, no amount of physical abuse, fire power, and nuclear explosions will provide an audience with psychological catharsis. This is the final horror of the film. There is no reassurance in its closing images of Ripley and Newt, sleeping peacefully in their capsules. They look like Snow White (Ripley has earlier been sarcastically dubbed "Snow White" by the fiery Vasquez for her frigidity), whose female sexuality may be awakened by a kiss, unleashing the power of the Alien other yet again. One might even recall here the other sleeping females of the film—the quiescent lab specimens, drifting in liquid sleep, but ready to strike when the glass tube shatters.

Woman's reproductive capacity is a potential threat, not only to woman herself—to Ripley and the younger version of herself, Newt—but also, it is implied, to civilization, technological progress, the futuristic world depicted in *Aliens.* This world is peopled principally by young or vigorously middle-aged Company employees. Newt almost seems anomalous: so there still are families, near-relations who care for one another? Ripley, except for her new maternalism, is an existential atom. She has slept for fifty-seven years when the film opens, which might explain her apparent isolation, but she also never expresses anguish or even interest about her past on earth, the people whom she might have cared for or who might have cared for her, now dead and lost in the years of space sleep. In this futuristic world, furthermore, nuclear explosions seem to be less threatening than the Alien other. Ripley, Newt, Bishop, and Hicks are barely off the planet when their ship is rocked by nuclear explosion, but they feel "safe" at last. The Company has technologies for making a planet's atmosphere livable for humans, so we might assume that science can solve every problem, except those created by female biology, by the Alien other in our own nature.

For this reason, *Aliens* is likely to generate an *Aliens III* in which culture again is pitted against nature, figured as female and maternal, a womb-tomb that threatens to engulf everyone in the limitations of our bodies, our creatureliness, our biological functions. The character of Newt, on the verge of sexual maturity, can be saved only temporarily from the dangers lurking in her female body. Her potential danger is hinted at in the nickname "Newt"—another word for salamander, linking the girl to the Alien's slimy animality and femininity. "Newt" may also be understood as short for "neutral," too young to be sexually threatening. From my own feminist perspective, the relationship of Ripley and Newt is dangerously attractive in the way it revises the myth of Demeter and Persephone, the story of a mother who descends into Hades to save her daughter from the dark netherworld of Dis, the male god who rapes Persephone and makes her his queen. A faint echo of this myth can be heard in Hudson's exclamation, "We're going down to hell!" when the marines first land on the Alien planet. The classical myth, however, celebrates female fertility and a mother-daughter relationship based on biology as well as sentiment. Demeter makes a deal with Dis: for six months of the year, autumn and winter, nature will die as Demeter mourns for her daughter's captivity. They will be reunited in joy and seasonal renewal, spring and summer, the other six months. Ripley is no fertility goddess, but an antifertility mother, and the Alien other is not a rapist male god, but the female body's reproductive powers. Hence the film's overt feminism, highly praised in the reviews' discussion of Sigourney Weaver as Ripley, is a feminism in service to technology over nature, with woman's intelligence and emotions firmly Alien-ated from her body.

NOTES

1. Gaylyn Studlar, in "Masochism and the Perverse Pleasures of the Cinema," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies,* 9 (Fall, 1984), 267–282, aligns film voyeurism (spectatorial pleasure) with a masochism embedded in the infant's pre-Oedipal relationship to the mother. Although Studlar does not concern herself with the peculiar and painful pleasures of horror films, her psychoanalysis (derived from Gille Deleuze) of audiences' ambivalent fascination with cinematic *femmes fatales* is suggestive of the Alien's psychic power over her victims both within the film and in the audience. The pre-Oedipal child in all of us, Studlar argues, longs for "re-fusion . . . complete symbiosis" with "the oral mother of masochism"—"first environment and agent of control." In addition, she notes that "the promise of blissful reincorporation into the mother's body . . . is also a threat." Obviously the Alien Mama is principally a threat of cruel devourment, but one that exerts a fatal charm for audiences. She may well embody the masochist's principal fantasy of a "symbiotic reunion with the idealized maternal rule. The masochist imagines the final triumph of a parthenogenetic rebirth from the mother" (p. 271).

2. Studlar describes Dietrich's *femme fatale* in Von Sternberg's films as not solely the sexual object of a male gaze, "but also the holder of a 'controlling' gaze that turns the male into an object of 'to-be-looked-at-ness'," hence asserting, as "the mother of plenitude," her "presence and her power" (p. 273). Notably in *Aliens,* only another female, another "mother" like Ripley, is capable of returning the Alien's gaze without being paralyzed into inaction or turning into a blubbering infant like most of the males in the film.

3. I am referring here to Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) and Dorothy Dinnerstein's *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978). Both Chodorow and Dinnerstein argue that women learn to mother, that mothering is not an instinctual urge, and that the strictures of gender roles might be broken to the benefit of everyone if men were to share in the nurturing tasks of raising children. Pertinent to my argument is Chodorow's careful separation of the biological from the social dimensions of mothering. As Chodorow notes, "Being a mother, then, is not only bearing a child—it is being a person who socializes and nurtures" (p. 11). Ripley's characterization has elicited praise from critics for its combination of feminist and maternal virtues; yet Ripley might be seen as offering reassurance to audiences that "liberated" women will choose to mother even if they do not choose to give birth. *Aliens* would be a more feminist film perhaps if Ripley were a man.

4. As Studlar notes, in masochistic fantasies invoking the oral mother, she "assumes all symbolic functions," and quoting Deleuze, "The father is nothing . . . he is deprived of all symbolic function" (p. 271).

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MICHAEL ANDEREGG

"Every Third Word a Lie:"

Rhetoric and History in Orson Welles's *Chimes at Midnight**

Chimes at Midnight has come to be recognized, over the last decade or so, both as one of the most intelligent and imaginative of films adapted from Shakespeare and as one of Orson Welles's finest achievements, a film at least equal in evergy and brilliance to *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons.*[1] The chorus of praise occasionally includes a few sour notes, however; as so often with Welles's post *Citizen Kane* films, various qualifications temper even highly enthusiastic assessments.[2] Criticism tends to center on the sound track and on the uncertain relationship between sound and image: the recording is technically faulty, Shakespeare's words are frequently unintelligible (Welles's Falstaff, in particular, is difficult to understand much of the time), several sequences are poorly synchronized, and, disconcertingly, a number of the minor actors have been dubbed by Welles himself—all signs that inadequate financing forced artistic compromise. Additionally, critics find fault with Welles for the film's haphazard continuity and for a general inattention to detail, especially in the casting and playing of the secondary roles. In short, *Chimes at Midnight* is often discussed in terms that remind us of Shakespeare's Sir John Falstaff himself: attractive, vibrant, large, complex, but, withal, so deeply flawed as to negate many of its virtues.

In this essay, I would like to place both the unquestioned successes and the supposed defects of *Chimes at Midnight* within the context of what I take to be the film's governing strategy: the rewriting of Shakespeare's text, a rewriting that includes an attempted erasure of writing, a critique of rhetoric, an undermining of language itself. Taking up what is undeniably present in Shakespeare—no writer shows more awareness of the dangerous seductiveness of words—Welles carries the questioning of language much further than Shakespeare, whose primary resource was language, ever could. *Chimes at Midnight* centers squarely on a conflict between rhetoric and history, on the one hand, and the immediacy of a pre-linguistic, pre-lapsarian, timeless physical world, on the other. This conflict comes to us primarily through the actions and character of Falstaff, as we might expect, but it informs as well the texture and style of each moment of Welles's film. With remarkable boldness, Welles has made a Shakespearean film in which poetry itself seems to undergo a rigorous devaluation.

To a certain extent, of course, Welles had to rewrite Shakespeare as part of the process of adaptation: no Shakespearian film reproduces Shakespeare's text in its entirety (nor, for that matter, do most stage productions). But Welles's editorial decisions nevertheless aim at a particular end and have a specific focus. He compresses and reshapes his source material at will, reducing it to a bare minimum of words. Drawing primarily on *Henry IV,* Parts I and II, adding a few lines from *Richard II, Henry V,* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* Welles gives Shakespeare's story of a prince's coming of age a single plot line and a new emphasis. Critics have often noted that *Henry IV,* Part II, in many ways recapitulates, albeit in a different key, the structure and theme of Part I: Shakespeare presents two scenes of reconciliation between Hal and his father, two military engagements (Shrewsbury and Galtree Forest), two moments when Hal realizes his destiny, and so forth. Welles, while doing away with much of this repetition, shifts scenes and parts of scenes around at his convenience, placing Falstaff's recruitment of soldiers in Part II, for ex-

*The film was originally released in the US under the title *Falstaff.*

Orson Welles, Margaret Rutherford, Jeanne Moreau in CHIMES AT MIDNIGHT

ample, before Part I's battle of Shrewsbury. Although Welles's refashioning of Shakespeare's text(s) has a number of consequences, the primary effect is to shift the thematic emphasis away from Hal and towards Falstaff, or, to put it another way, away from history and towards satire.[3]

The critique of history in *Chimes at Midnight* completes a process already begun by Shakespeare, but Welles's attack is harsher, his conclusion far less optimistic. "History," for the purposes of my argument, includes the whole world of kings and politics, of war and chivalry, as well as the language, the rhetoric, which is that world's chief expressive medium. Shakespeare's Henriad comprehends a set of binary oppositions—Court/Tavern, Honor/Dishonor, Hotspur/Falstaff, Henry IV/Falstaff, Time/Timelessness, Word/Being, Serious/Non-serious—where either the first term is the privileged one or where both terms have been suspended in an uneasy equilibrium, leaving to Hal the task of determining which to choose, or if indeed a choice has to be made at all. In Welles's film, these paired alternatives are unbalanced, diminished, reversed, or exploded. Shakespeare's Hal has always already made the choice, though he appears to be choosing all the time. For Welles's Hal, the choice poses genuine and insoluble problems.[4] The various embodiments of "positive" values, what I have simply termed "History," have little exemplary force in *Chimes at Midnight,* tending at times to degenerate, at the level of language, into the incoherent babbling of poseurs, cynics, and fools. At the same time, any attempt to abolish language, to ignore the power of words, leads inevitably to destruction. Here, Falstaff stands as the cautionary figure, and his desire to abolish language and put sheer physicality in its place becomes the tragic fulcrum upon which Welles's film turns.

Welles's strategy for undermining history and rhetoric only begins with the process of adaptation. His tactics are primarily stylistic. History and (verbal) rhetoric are constantly displaced, replaced by Welles's nervous, erratic, decentered, unstable visual and aural style, a

flow of images and sounds that thoroughly dismantle Shakespeare's text, peeling away layers of strategically placed and carefully joined verbal and thematic checks against disintegration. In this context, the supposed problems with the sound track become less a matter of technical flaws (though flaws there are, as Welles has publicly lamented), and more a question of Welles's intentions and methods.[5] In some shots, for example, the actors deliver their lines as they, or the camera, or both, are in rapid motion. Or a character will make an important speech from the depth of an extreme long shot, depriving us of lip movement and facial expression, both important cues for the understanding of unfamiliar language and syntax. Furthermore, Welles constructs jarring editing patterns that easily distract from the spoken word. At several points, even what Welles has structured to resemble continuity editing turns into something unexpected. A simple reverse shot, for example, may involve illogical changes in time and/or space. These and other stylistic idiosyncracies help to explain why we can follow the sound track of *Chimes at Midnight* more easily if we keep our eyes closed. In effect, Welles generates a constant tension between what we see and what we hear, a tension that points to the ambiguous status of language in its relation to action.

Welles further exhibits his ambivalence towards rhetoric in his handling of soliloquies. In his previous Shakespearian films, Welles had already suggested some discomfort with filmed soliloquies, resorting to a variety of voice-over techniques in *Macbeth,* and in *Othello* having some of his actors deliver soliloquies and speeches with their backs to the camera. In *Chimes,* Welles virtually does away with soliloquies as such by not allowing anyone to speak directly to the camera or to be truly alone: Hal's revelation (in Shakespeare, to the audience only) that his madcap humor is primarily for show ("I know you all") is spoken in Falstaff's presence; Falstaff delivers both his catechism on honor and his later dissertation on the virtues of sherris-sack directly to Hal. Even King Henry is not allowed a true soliloquy. His famous meditation on sleep, to choose a notable instance, though filmed in a single, uninterrupted take and in close-up, becomes an address to his courtiers; he is not, as he is in the play, alone. All soliloquies have thus become, at least implicitly, attempts at conversation, at communication within the diegetic universe, and not, as soliloquies can be, privileged moments where language provides a more or less unmediated access to thought.

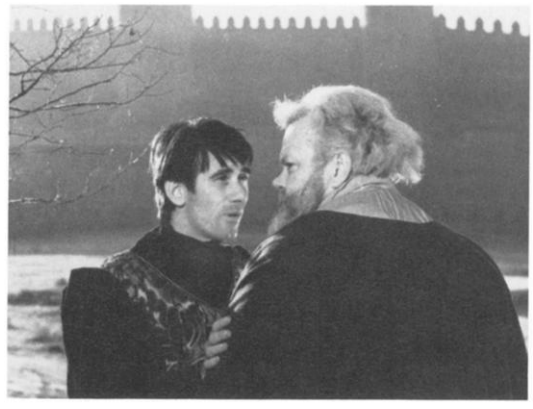
We can see Welles's strategy ideally realized at that moment when Hotspur—whose bath has been interrupted by the pressing demands of history—cries "That roan shall be my throne" and simultaneously drops the towel in which he has draped himself and turns away from the camera, revealing his bare behind. Hotspur's towel falls in the midst of a highly rhetorical gesture, a wide sweep of the arm that serves as punctuation for his words. Welles comically undermines Hotspur's rhetoric, lays bare his linguistic bravado, and ridicules his historical pretensions, his (partly unconscious) desire for the English throne. Hotspur's words have already been mocked throughout this scene by the trumpeters who echo his belligerent posings with elaborate, comic fanfares. The trumpets say as much as he does, and are equally meaningful as rational statement. Hotspur's dropped towel suggests an additional meaning as well, one contiguous with that just described: for a moment, Hotspur reveals the physical he tries to deny or push aside in the semi-playful, semi-serious exchange with his wife, Kate, that follows this scene. The dropped towel signifies the return of the repressed, cancelling Hotspur's attempt to replace sensuality with rhetoric (war, history, etc.), to deny the body by asserting the word.

In what is perhaps the most remarkable sequence in *Chimes at Midnight,* the battle of Shrewsbury, Welles presents us with another kind of history—a history stripped of all rhetoric, denuded of language, and at the same time supremely eloquent. Here, the rhetorical dismemberment of the body politic, the scenes of accusation and counter-accusation between the royal party and the highborn conspirators, becomes displaced and mocked by the literal dismemberment of the body physical. Welles's style forcefully underlines the brutal, unheroic character of hand-to-hand combat in a nervously edited mosaic of varied shots, some photographed with a handheld camera, some filmed with wide-angle lenses, some in slow motion, some speeded up, some shots static and

others that employ swish pans or other kinds of rapid movement, together with a complex, many-layered sound track of shouts and screams, of the clash of sword against sword, armor against armor, of grunts and cries and cracking bones. Welles conjures up Armegeddon, a nightmare vision of destruction which points up the futility of this or any other war. By the end, both armies have become one huge, awkward, disintegrating war machine, a grotesque robot whose power source slowly begins to fail and finally comes to a frozen halt. Verbal rhetoric—language itself—seems, for the moment, both irrelevant and obscene.

In this context, the highly verbal King Henry IV, the only character in the film whose words and speeches are allowed their full Shakespearean weight and style, stands in ironic counterpoint to the carnage of Shrewsbury. As John Gielgud plays him, and as Welles directs his scenes, King Henry is reduced to a nearly disembodied voice. The most "poetic" and rhetorical figure in Welles's film, he is also the most ethereal. Cold, pinched, ascetic, photographed sitting on or standing near his throne set on a high stone platform, his face illuminated by a harsh, white light, he is an isolated, distant figure of overbearing but brittle authority. As Falstaff seems to be all flesh, Henry seems all words. But even the king's voice fails him: he can neither govern his son with it nor tame the rebels, who refuse to credit his verbal promises. Henry's highly rhetorical manner, meant to gloss over his insecurities and fears, finaly serves to reveal them. His voice becomes an object of parody: at various points in the film, Hotspur, Hal, and Falstaff all imitate Gielgud's immediately recognizable vocal characteristics. The "beauty" of Henry's speech only serves to place in an even harsher light his asceticism, coldness, and largely self-imposed isolation; a supreme poseur, he cannot see beyond his role. Although never really alone, Henry seems to speak only to himself.

King Henry's dependence on words becomes ideally focused in a scene Welles has totally refashioned from Shakespeare. After the battle of Shrewsbury, Falstaff takes credit for killing Hotspur, spinning another one of his outrageous lies for Hal's benefit. Welles gives the scene a special emphasis by having King Henry present as Falstaff tells his tale. The king, for



Keith Baxter as Hal, Orson Welles as Falstaff

once, says nothing, and Hal, too, is silent, but their faces tell a clear enough story. Earlier, Hal had told his father that he would redeem himself for his bad behavior "on Percy's head/ And in the closing of some glorious day,/ Be bold to tell you that I am your son, . . ." Now is the moment when this prophecy should come true, when the moving rhetoric should be realized in action. But Hal fails to make good on his promise. Unwilling to expose Falstaff, he refuses to say the words his father so much wants to hear, and the moment slips by. The silence, emphasized by a series of static close-ups, takes on precise thematic significance. We can tell, from Henry's expression, that he knows very well who killed Hotspur, but the knowledge, without the words, is not enough. We see, too, the conflict within Hal. And, finally, we can read in Falstaff's face his understanding of what the other two are thinking. For all three as well as for us, silence acquires a rhetorical force ordinarily reserved to speech.[6]

If the world of kings overvalues words, the tavern world fatally undervalues them. In the tavern world, which for my purposes includes the Justice Shallow scenes, words are acknowledged to mean very little. Falstaff's notorious lies, and the ease with which everyone sees through them, are symptomatic, but many of his cohorts share his linguistic deviance. Shallow constantly reminisces about the old days, but "every third word" he speaks, according to Falstaff, is "a lie." Falstaff's hanger-on, Ancient Pistol, is perhaps the most unintelligible character in the film. In Shakespeare, he is already rhetorically tedious; his primary function is to cast in ironic light,

through highflown speeches and outrageous behavior, the chivalric code. But in a world where rhetoric and history are so constantly and thoroughly brought into question, Welles takes the extreme course of reducing Pistol to little more than noise. Against Pistol's meaningless bombast, we have Silence's inability to say anything at all. Welles afflicts him with a stutter so severe that he cannot complete his sentences. Shallow must speak for him, must become in effect his voice (a nice joke in a film where so many characters are clearly dubbed). Words are interchangeable, attach themselves to no one in particular, have no individual meaning. Speech, in short, appears to be as debased through undervaluing in the tavern world as it is debased through overvaluing in the court world.

The difficulty of penetrating language, of determining the truth and weight of words, of reading history, comes to be, in especial, Falstaff's dilemma. Falstaff distrusts words; in a sense, he himself has nothing to say, certainly nothing with which to answer King Henry, who is all speech, all words, the very incarnation of logos. Falstaff's own words are frequently unintelligible, or nearly so, because he wants to deny the efficacy of language. (Welles the actor here exaggerates his post-*Citizen Kane* tendency to downplay the orotund and avuncular qualities of his vocal delivery by deliberately "throwing away" words and lines and even entire speeches.) But, though words may be questioned, subverted, and parodied, they cannot be abolished. Falstaff's refusal to credit words at all leads to his undoing. Even Hal's words—especially Hal's words—mean little to Falstaff, though Hal is at great pains throughout to make his motives clear. Welles's presentation of Hal, an attractive, appealing prince as played by Keith Baxter, runs counter to some modern, especially theatrical, views of the Henriad which condemn Hal as a cold, hypocritical careerist who cynically uses Falstaff for his own ends. Instead, Welles deliberately distorts Shakespeare's text at several points in order to stress Hal's straightforwardness. I've already noted that Hal's revealing "I know you all" meditation is no longer a soliloquy in the film; it is delivered in Falstaff's hearing, the second half of it spoken directly to him. Similarly, when Hal, speaking as his father at the end of the famous play scene, tells Falstaff that he will indeed banish him ("I do; I will"), he gives the words a moving, elegiac tone that render their meaning unmistakable to anyone not as bent on self-deception as Falstaff is.

Against language, Falstaff posits being, presence, physicality. We are made aware, throughout Welles's film, of Falstaff as sheer physical mass. His huge figure—sometimes just his face alone—often dominates the frame. Although he enters the film in the depth of an extreme long shot, a small, round object on the horizon, he gradually moves toward the camera until his head alone fills over three-fourths of the image, leaving what remains to his companion, Shallow. In the play scene, two men and a boy must help Falstaff onto his makeshift "throne." Before the battle of Shrewsbury, his followers valiantly attempt to raise him to his saddle with block and tackle, only to drop his armor-encased body to the ground. At the Boar's Head tavern, stairways and corridors seem too narrow for his passage. The point is made most strikingly in the Gadshill episode, where Falstaff's monk's robe transforms him into a huge white tent which sharply contrasts with the thin, black trees that surround him. Falstaff's girth is, of course, a running joke in Shakespeare, but Welles goes out of his way to elaborate on the theme; he seems intent on suggesting the extent to which Falstaff's world is physical, corporeal, of the flesh. Falstaff's relationships are expressed in predominently tactile ways, his rotund figure giving others, especially Hal and Doll Tearsheet, something to grasp, to hold on to, or—in Doll's case—to climb on.

Although Welles has said that, for him, Falstaff was "the greatest conception of a good man, the most completely good man, in all drama,"[7] *Chimes at Midnight* presents a far more ambivalent portrait of Falstaff than these words suggest. We cannot doubt that Welles sympathizes, both as director and as actor, with Falstaff's desire to bypass language and thereby gain access to an unmediated reality. At the same time, we know, and Welles knows, that in a fallen world, such a desire is folly. And we know as well that, like many Wellesian heroes, Falstaff longs for an Edenic world only because he has long since forfeited it. Welles's Falstaff is far from the jolly knight seen in various theatrical interpretations of the role. Rather, he seems more the corrupt, gross "misleader of

youth" that Hal and others claim he is. Some readers have seen two Falstaffs emerging from the two parts of *Henry IV,* the second considerably less pleasant than the first. But whether the Falstaff of Part II is really a different character from the Falstaff of Part I, or whether he evolves naturally in the course of the two plays, Welles chose to combine both Falstaffs in his performance. Welles's Falstaff is, in Beverle Houston's felicitous phrase, a "Power Baby," an "eating, sucking, foetus-like creature"[8] whose benignity is an illusion. Pre-linguistic, he is forever locked in the imaginary world of infancy. Like Kane, like Arkadin, like Quinlan, like Clay, Falstaff is fundamentally, irredeemably corrupt. A larger-than-life figure flawed by hubris, he tragically collaborates in his own destruction.

Falstaff's defeat has a specifically linguistic dimension: Hal's rejection of him is a rhetorical act, the new king of England's maiden speech, the son's entrance into the symbolic world of his father. (By staging this scene in the midst of the coronation ceremony, Welles puts the emphasis as much on Hal's humiliation as on Falstaff's.) Falstaff's response to Hal's elaborate, majestic, and witty rebuke is nonverbal: we must read it in Welles's expression. What we see are emotions in conflict: awe, perhaps pride (this is *his* king, after all), and a wistfulness not unmixed with cunning (is he already thinking of a "starting hole," a way out?). The dominant emotion, however, is disbelief: Hal's words cannot be meaningful, they are rhetoric only; Falstaff sees through and beyond them. Shakespeare's Falstaff, we feel, indulges himself in sheer bravado when he tells Shallow "This that you heard was but a color . . . I shall be sent for soon at night."[9] For Welles's Falstaff, these words suggest not bravado so much as a deeply felt hope, a nearly desperate attempt to render words meaningless. But Hal not only means what he says, he now has the power to turn words into deeds, and his words and deeds kill Falstaff.

In keeping with his method throughout the film, Welles strips even Falstaff's death of easy sentiment. Mistress Quickly's description of Falstaff's last moments functions as a piece of information for a clearly unmoved Poins; spoken with Falstaff already in his coffin, her words lack the immediacy they have in Shakespeare's *Henry V.* Welles barely prepares us for this crucial finale: one moment Falstaff is alive, if crushed; the next moment he is dead. No illness, no tears, no bedside scene as in Laurence Olivier's film of *Henry V.* Only a final irony: words continue to fail Falstaff, even after death. In a complete departure from Shakespeare's text, Welles concludes his film with the image of Falstaff's coffin passing away in the distance while on the sound track Ralph Richardson recites a passage from Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland,* a passage in praise of King Henry V, who, we are told, "was so humane withal that he left no offense unpunished or friendship unrewarded."[10] Whatever we may think of the truth or justice of Holinshed's words, one irony, at least, is certain: in *Chimes at Midnight,* a film that thoroughly reveals the hollowness of kings and their fine words, language and history stubbornly abide when all else is gone.[11]

NOTES

1. See, for example, Joseph McBride, *Orson Welles* (New York: Viking Press, 1972); James Naremore, *The Magic World of Orson Welles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Samuel Crowl, "The Long Goodbye: Welles and Falstaff," *Shakespeare Quarterly,* 31 (Autumn, 1980), 369–380; and the comments by David Bordwell ("*Citizen Kane,*" *Film Comment,* 7 (1971), 38–47) and Brian Henderson ("The Long Take," *Film Comment,* 7 (1971), 6–11); both of these essays have been reprinted in *Movies and Methods,* ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976).

2. Most of the negative points are summarized by Jack Jorgens in *Shakespeare on Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); Jorgens, however, provides a generally positive analysis. See also Charles Higham, *The Films of Orson Welles* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970); Higham writes of Welles's "impatience with detail and finalization that, combined with [his] tragic perennial lack of funds, have left the work just short of the triumph it should have been" (p. 177).

3. Samuel Crowl, cited above, convincingly demonstrates that "Welles's overriding visual and structural emphasis is to signal farewell, to say a long goodbye to Falstaff, rather than to celebrate Hal's homecoming to princely right reason and responsible rule" (p. 373).

4. For a sensitive discussion of Hal's role in Welles's film, see Leland Poague, "'Reading' the Prince: Shakespeare, Welles, and Some Aspects of *Chimes at Midnight,*" *Iowa State Journal of Research,* 56, 1 (August, 1981), 57–65.

5. Dudley Andrew's comments on the nature of Welles's sound track in *Chimes at Midnight* and in other films closely parallel my own observations. See *Film in the Aura of Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 164–168.

6. John Gielgud later recalled that "we never did the scene at all. On the last day Orson said, 'There's a close-up I have to do of you, just look down there, that's Hotspur's body, now look up at me'" (Gyles Brandreth, *John Gielgud: A Celebration* (Little, Brown and Company: Boston, 1984), p. 152).

7. Juan Cobos and Miguel Rubio, "Welles and Falstaff," *Sight and Sound,* 35 (Autumn, 1966), 158–163; 159.

8. "Power and Dis-Integration in the Films of Orson Welles," *Film Quarterly,* 35 (Summer, 1982), 2-12; 2.
9. Henry IV, Part II, 5.5.85-6 and 89-90, cited from *The Arden Edition,* ed. A.R. Humphreys (London: Methuen, 1966).
10. Stanley S. Rubin discusses Welles's use of Holinshed as a narrative device in "Welles/Falstaff/Shakespeare/Welles: The Narrative Structure of *Chimes at Midnight,*" *Film Criticism,* 2 (Winter/Spring, 1978), 66-71.
11. By the end of Welles's film, Andrew McLean notes, "An epoch has passed, a world view has altered, and a new historical consciousness has been born" ("Orson Welles and Shakespeare: History and Consciousness in *Chimes at Midnight,*" *Literature/Film Quarterly,* 11 (1983), 197-202; 202).

SCOTT MacDONALD

Morgan Fisher: An Interview

Since 1968, Morgan Fisher has been making films that provide informed, witty discourses on the apparatus of film production. To date he has completed twelve films—*The Director and His Actor Look at Footage Showing Preparations for an Unmade Film (2)* (1968, two versions of this film were made; Fisher distributes only the second), *Documentary Footage* (1968), *Phi Phenomenon* (1968), *Screening Room* (1968), *Production Stills* (1970), *Production Footage* (1971), *Picture and Sound Rushes* (1973), *The Wilkinson Household Fire Alarm* (1973), *Cue Rolls* (1974), *240x* (1974), *Projection Instructions* (1976), *Standard Gauge* (1984)—each of which creates intensive conceptual involvement with fundamental filmic questions, often by placing the viewer's usual ways of thinking about the cinematic apparatus into crisis.

Production Stills may be the most elegant of Fisher's early films. In a single, continuous, roll-long shot, we see at first a blank screen (actually a portion of a white wall) and a flash of light; then, after thirty seconds or so, hands enter the image and mount a black-and-white Polaroid photograph in the center of the image: this photograph, and the seven which are subsequently mounted, one at a time, in the same way, reveal the procedure we are apparently seeing the results of. The first Polaroid is a long shot of four people and a large camera rig; in subsequent Polaroids we see this impressive setup from a variety of angles. Throughout the film we hear what we assume are the sounds of the procedure. As simple as *Production Stills* may seem in comparison with conventional films, it is capable of confounding our filmic assumptions and the categories we normally employ to describe film experiences. *Production Stills* is a single, unedited shot; and yet, each new Polaroid "shot" reveals a different aspect of an on-going procedure: the result is a film that is simultaneously unedited and "edited." The film is both "minimal"—it's one continuous, roll-long shot of eight Polaroids—and "maximal": Fisher used a sophisticated, industry-grade camera set-up (a Mitchell on a Moviola crab dolly on a sound stage). The Polaroids are black-and-white and the wall on which they're mounted is white, but the fingers which we see for a few seconds mounting each image are in color: the film is simultaneously black-and-white and color. Fisher has made an obviously noncommercial, avant-garde film; and yet his means—the industry equipment being used; the fact that he's directing a crew; and, of course, the making of production stills—are precisely those developed by the commercial industry: *Production Stills* is simultaneously an "avant-garde" and an "industry" film.

Each of Fisher's films foregrounds a different set of procedures, pieces of equipment, and issues in ways that generate conceptual ironies and paradoxes. In *The Director and His Actor Look at Footage Showing Preparations for an Unmade Film (2),* we see two men (Fisher and Paul Morrison) in various production stages of

8. "Power and Dis-Integration in the Films of Orson Welles," *Film Quarterly,* 35 (Summer, 1982), 2-12; 2.
9. Henry IV, Part II, 5.5.85-6 and 89-90, cited from *The Arden Edition,* ed. A.R. Humphreys (London: Methuen, 1966).
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Morgan Fisher: An Interview

Since 1968, Morgan Fisher has been making films that provide informed, witty discourses on the apparatus of film production. To date he has completed twelve films—*The Director and His Actor Look at Footage Showing Preparations for an Unmade Film (2)* (1968, two versions of this film were made; Fisher distributes only the second), *Documentary Footage* (1968), *Phi Phenomenon* (1968), *Screening Room* (1968), *Production Stills* (1970), *Production Footage* (1971), *Picture and Sound Rushes* (1973), *The Wilkinson Household Fire Alarm* (1973), *Cue Rolls* (1974), *240x* (1974), *Projection Instructions* (1976), *Standard Gauge* (1984)—each of which creates intensive conceptual involvement with fundamental filmic questions, often by placing the viewer's usual ways of thinking about the cinematic apparatus into crisis.

Production Stills may be the most elegant of Fisher's early films. In a single, continuous, roll-long shot, we see at first a blank screen (actually a portion of a white wall) and a flash of light; then, after thirty seconds or so, hands enter the image and mount a black-and-white Polaroid photograph in the center of the image: this photograph, and the seven which are subsequently mounted, one at a time, in the same way, reveal the procedure we are apparently seeing the results of. The first Polaroid is a long shot of four people and a large camera rig; in subsequent Polaroids we see this impressive setup from a variety of angles. Throughout the film we hear what we assume are the sounds of the procedure. As simple as *Production Stills* may seem in comparison with conventional films, it is capable of confounding our filmic assumptions and the categories we normally employ to describe film experiences. *Production Stills* is a single, unedited shot; and yet, each new Polaroid "shot" reveals a different aspect of an on-going procedure: the result is a film that is simultaneously unedited and "edited." The film is both "minimal"—it's one continuous, roll-long shot of eight Polaroids—and "maximal": Fisher used a sophisticated, industry-grade camera set-up (a Mitchell on a Moviola crab dolly on a sound stage). The Polaroids are black-and-white and the wall on which they're mounted is white, but the fingers which we see for a few seconds mounting each image are in color: the film is simultaneously black-and-white and color. Fisher has made an obviously noncommercial, avant-garde film; and yet his means—the industry equipment being used; the fact that he's directing a crew; and, of course, the making of production stills—are precisely those developed by the commercial industry: *Production Stills* is simultaneously an "avant-garde" and an "industry" film.

Each of Fisher's films foregrounds a different set of procedures, pieces of equipment, and issues in ways that generate conceptual ironies and paradoxes. In *The Director and His Actor Look at Footage Showing Preparations for an Unmade Film (2),* we see two men (Fisher and Paul Morrison) in various production stages of

a film which, judging from the title, never got made. And yet, every process we see "documented" in the film posits another process (or processes): the process of looking at footage in the screening room which opens the film, for example, is only available to us because Fisher was, at the time, making footage of himself and Morrison looking (or supposedly looking) at footage, and subsequently looked at that footage and made it into a portion of the film we're watching. The film is a labyrinth of such complexities. *Documentary Footage* confronts, among other issues, our conventional distinction between documentary and dramatization; *Production Footage* centers on the differences in working with a studio camera (a 16mm Mitchell) and a more mobile hand-held camera (a 16mm Eclair); *Picture and Sound Rushes* on the relationship between sound and image; *Screening Room* and *Projection Instructions* on the apparatus of the projection space; and *Phi Phenomenon* on the fundamental psychological mechanism that makes motion pictures possible.

After *Projection Instructions* Fisher presented several film installations—*Southern Exposure* (1977), *North Light* (1979), *Passing Time* (1979), and *Color Balance* (1980)—but he did not finish another film for nearly ten years, until *Standard Gauge*. Using scraps of 35mm film collected while working in the industry—over the years he has worked on a variety of kinds of commercial film—Fisher fashioned a poignant, autobiographical 16mm review of his 35mm film-making experiences. Using bits of leader and other throwaways, Fisher wittily dramatizes the fragility of the film medium in general, and the nature of his position as an experimental/avant-garde film-maker vis-à-vis the industry.

I first spoke with Fisher in August of 1981 at his home in Santa Monia. Subsequently, we exchanged many drafts of the interview before it achieved its present form.

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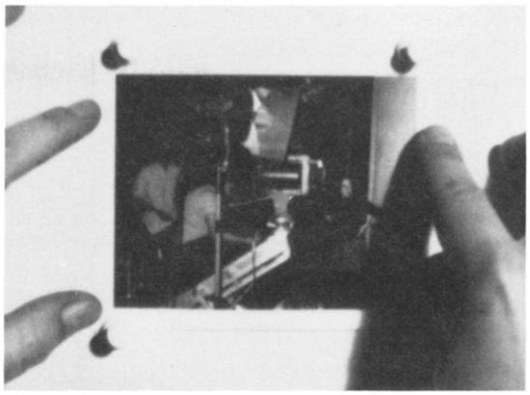
I was surprised to learn that you had worked on commercial features with Roger Corman and Haskell Wexler.

I would have thought it was apparent from my films that I had some kind of relationship



PRODUCTION STILLS, *by Morgan Fisher*

with the industry at the practical level. The industry has always been important for me. I became interested in film-making in the middle sixties, when *Film Culture* presented articles about the New American Cinema and films made in Hollywood on an equal footing. In the same issue were stills from *Flaming Creatures* and the opening sequence of *The Naked Kiss,* where Constance Towers beats up her pimp. That was a golden moment. The unifying idea was that of being an artist in film, no matter where. Soon afterwards the critical politics of independent film-making in New York shifted, and you felt put in the position of having to choose between these two kinds of practice. In my work I have tried to acknowledge the accomplishments of the industry and to maintain an openness toward it. I regard the industry as a source of ideas and material, and to some degree as a model, even though I also criticize it. My attitude toward it is ambivalent, to say the least.

But at any rate, during the early seventies I worked as an editor on low-budget features. I was the second editor on *The Student Nurses* (1970), for which Roger Corman was the executive producer. It was his first film, I think, after he formed New World. But I worked under him, not with him, since I saw him only when we screened the cuts. Later on I was the editor of an independent feature called—it had three titles—*The Second Coming, Blood Virgin,* and *Messiah of Evil,* the title under which it was finally released (in 1975). It was a horror film, need I say, and was intended as a straightforward exploitation programmer. I did some second-unit directing, and I also had a bit part in the film opposite Marianna Hill. She had

been in *Red Line 7000* and later played the wife of Fredo in *The Godfather II.* In my scenes with her I played an assistant in an art gallery. She comes in looking for her father, a painter who's gone mad and has vanished, and I try to throw her off the track. I wore the same suit that I later wore in Owen Land's *On the Marriage Broker Joke [as Cited by Sigmund Freud in "Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious" or Can the Avant-Garde Artist Be Wholed?*].

Messiah of Evil had a commercial release, but it was withdrawn after an abbreviated run because of legal problems. In Los Angeles it played at a big popcorn theater downtown, where for the first and only time I saw the film with a real audience. The atmosphere was similar to the theaters on 42nd Street. I sat behind a large woman whose responses to the film were quite vocal. When I had done my scene I was nervous, so I was pale and my voice trembled. But it turned out that these seeming flaws in my performance fitted perfectly with the spooky weirdness that was the intended effect of the scene. When I came on the screen, I had the pleasure of hearing this woman in front of me say, in this genuinely feeling tone, "That guy gives me the creeps." I've heard a rumor that the film was re-released under still another title, but again only briefly. I don't think it's in distribution anymore. Among people who've managed to see it, it's become something of a cult film. In a poll published in *Film Comment* in 1976, several dozen British film figures, mostly critics, were asked to name their twelve favorite films of all time, and two of them mentioned *Messiah of Evil.* Someone else named *Eadweard Muybridge, Zoopraxographer,* the documentary by Thom Andersen that I worked on as editor and general collaborator. The Muybridge film was also listed by two critics in the 1976 *Sight and Sound* poll of the ten best films released that year in Great Britain.

For Haskell Wexler I was a stock footage researcher for a couple of weeks, for a feature that never materialized. It was supposed to be the next film after *Medium Cool.* I was looking for scenes of people dying violent deaths, and one of the shots I found was in Bruce Conner's *A Movie,* the execution scene where the man is sitting in a chair with his back to the firing squad. According to the microfilm at the stock footage library, he had been the warden of a prison in fascist Italy. The motif of fascism in *A Movie* is very pronounced, but in anything I've ever read about the film, that's gone unmentioned. It's an extremely powerful and seductive film. People must realize what it is they're responding to and don't want to face it in the film because it means having to face it in themselves. And *A Movie* is the one independent film that everyone likes. The film plays on destruction as spectacle, and it's haunted by a kind of dreadful euphoria, and Mussolini is in the film, dead. And the music, *The Pines of Rome* by Respighi, is related to fascism, and in a double sense. As I understand it, Respighi was associated with Fascism at the level of organized politics, though whether as a matter of expedience or out of conviction, I don't know. And the music is program music, which can be called fascist in an extended or poetic sense, if that isn't a contradiction, since it's intended to describe specific scenes, that is to say, to preempt your reaction to it, to control you, because there is only one correct response.

Conner's method as a film-maker—found footage and collage—is one of the subjects of a film I'm working on [*Standard Gauge*]. It's an autobiographical sketch of the time I've spent in the industry, organized around pieces of 35mm film that I've scavenged over the years. It's all found footage, but instead of being brought to life by projection, as in Conner, it's presented as inert material, as separate strips of film. It's like show and tell, a picture album with an extended commentary. The material is vastly miscellaneous so it lets me talk about all kinds of things, but the underlying subject of the film is the industry.

You're making it in 35mm?

No, it's in 16mm, but all you see are pieces of 35mm, one after another. It'll be a little bit like *Production Stills* in that it's literally a spatially and temporally continuous shot, within which a series of disjunctive visual events is presented.

Another of the film's subjects is gauge and the systems of economic activity that it implies. Gauge is one of the unexamined facts of movies. There are only a few gauges, and every film is on one or another of them. No independent film-maker, no matter how committed to the ideal of the personal and the artisanal and the poetic, makes his or her own raw stock; you work with what the industry gives you. There are organizations such as the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers that set

dimensions and standards for the industry, and they set these standards to the thousandth part of an inch. Every film is embedded in, or interwoven with, the same material form. As Bruce Conner has shown, this means that any film can become a part of any other film in a way that is utterly direct.

And since the film will show you pieces of film, strips of translucent celluloid, it brings up the question of film as an object. Unlike videotape, for example, film has a dual identity. When you look at a piece of videotape, no information is visible; it's encoded within the material such that it can be interpreted only by a machine. Film is equally prescribed as to its format, but if you pick up a piece of film, there's something to look at. Film can to some degree be read, experienced directly, without a machine, at the level of inert material. An awareness of the material base of film dominates our thinking about it. Sprocket holes are not a part of what we see when a film is projected, and yet we know they're there. They are, in fact, the universal emblem of film, as almost every film festival poster attests. And yet sprocket holes don't just stand for the physical medium, but for the idea of movie-ness in the broadest sense: theaters, projection, sitting in the dark, watching an image, *any* image, the entire potential of film.

A number of your films foreground equipment, and often industry-level equipment, as a subject. In Production Stills *you use a Mitchell, an industry camera;* Production Footage *presents an interaction between two kinds of 16mm cameras and the filming conventions that each implies; in* Cue Rolls *we see a synchronizer; in* 240x *you use a cel punch and an Oxberry animation stand; and in* Documentary Footage *the woman uses a tape recorder. You seem very involved with machinery, though in a very different way than, say, Légér or Eisenstein.*

Machines are what make movies. And as Thom Andersen points out in a long and fascinating essay that is on its way to being published as a book, film—the institution of film, the cinema—is itself a machine, a process of production whose product is none other than its audience, us. If, as I do, you want to take film itself as your subject, I think it's natural to approach it through equipment, because any single piece of machinery can be made to stand for the entire system of machines and what that system is capable of doing.

But the question comes up in connection with films that do not actually depict production. Film-makers sometimes choose their equipment as a way of dramatizing their position with respect to the politics of practice. For example, when Godard was shooting the episode on sloth for *The Seven Deadly Sins,* he wanted a camera that was, as he put it, "lazy." He chose, as I recall, a Debrie. To me that's more than just a joke. But this kind of thinking can easily exaggerate itself into a kind of fetishism. When I first became interested in film, the piece of equipment that was fetishized was the Bolex, the archetypal 16mm amateur camera. It was more or less the official camera of underground film. Someone would say in *Film Culture,* "I use no camera but the Bolex," as if it were an emblem of ideological correctness. There was a time when more than anything I wanted a Bolex, so that I too could be ideologically correct, but I never could afford one. In fact I've never owned any of the equipment I've used to produce my films. I've always rented or scrounged what I've needed. In its own mild way, I think it's just as much a polemical position not to own equipment and to get what you want only when you need it, as it is to always have your Bolex ready at your side.

A lot of my films are shot in sync, and when you work in sync it's easiest and simplest to use professional equipment. It would be perverse to

VIDEOCASSETTES BY MAIL

Readers living outside the handful of major metropolitan areas where esoteric, imported, or low-budget American films are screened will welcome the news that Facets Video, 1517 West Fullerton Avenue, Chicago, IL 60614, (phone 800-331-6197) is now renting VHS cassettes for $10.00 plus return postage. There is a $20 initial membership charge. Their collection, for sale as well as rental, includes almost 2,000 titles—mainline classics, science fiction, animation, children's films, silents, even a couple of dozen experimental films (Anger, Broughton, Deren, Harry Smith) and almost a hundred documentaries, up to *Shoah.*

do anything else. And within the category of professional equipment that's portable and simple to operate, there isn't much choice. An Arriflex, or an Eclair, and a Nagra are pretty much standard.

In *Production Stills* the point of the film was to replicate the situation of production that is standard in the industry, or even to overstate it. It was necessary to have a camera that looked like a studio camera, so I used a Mitchell. But in fact even if the idea of the film hadn't required using it, a Mitchell still would have been the best choice. The film was shot on a sound stage, where the ambient sound is negligible, so it was necessary to use the quietest camera possible. An Arri or an Eclair would be quiet enough shooting on location, but on a sound stage it probably would have been necessary to use a barney, and even then you still would probably have heard camera noise. Not so with a Mitchell in a blimp. It's a camera that's designed for only one purpose, and it does not compromise.

In fact the 16mm Mitchell is an old camera, which made it all the more perfect for *Production Stills.* For, older equipment is closer to the idea of "the movies." A Mitchell BNC or a BNCR, which are both 35mm cameras, are relatively old-fashioned and conservative designs, but I think of them as emblems of the industry, the old industry, Hollywood in its days of glory. For all I know a Panavision camera might be a better piece of equipment, but it just isn't the same.

The Director and His Actor . . . *originates in narrative, but the formal strategies you use—building the film up from roll-long units, jump-cutting, and multiple points of view—and your inclusion of film equipment produce a very unusual kind of narrative.*

Narrative film-making was my original interest, and it is a continuing interest. I make no apologies for it. It's always been a part of my work, however obliquely. In fact if there were no narrative film-making and no industry, I don't think I could do work. I don't mean this in the obvious sense, that—as would certainly be the case—without the industry, and industry in general, there would be no film or equipment and hence no independent film-making; in that respect we are all at the mercy of industrial capitalism, whose sympathies and motives are directed elsewhere. I just mean that for me the industry is a point of reference and a source, in both a positive and a negative sense, something to move toward and at the same time react to.

The Director . . . acknowledges the inexorability of the industry and of narrative, the form the industry depends on. As much as I like conventional narrative films, narrative is tedious and unsatisfying in a short film because it can't give you the complexity in form and characterization that you need for a narrative to fulfill itself. At best what you get is an elementary story, so all a film like that tells you is that it wants to grow up and be a *real* narrative, a feature-length film. In a short film that derives from narrative, the complexity has to come from somewhere else, so it's almost necessary to take an attitude toward narrative, to play off of the way it works in longer films. The last two segments of *The Director* . . . consist of two parallel series of stills. The first of these declares, by means of a title, that it is to be understood as a photographic storyboard, a film in schematic form, and it's a particularly pathetic and simple-minded film at that. The second is presented simply as a succession of stills taken by the actor in accordance with his own wishes. The mere fact of these images being presented in succession invites the viewer to narratize them, to draw connections and supply coherence, an invitation that is reinforced by their being presented in parallel with the first sequence, which explicitly announces itself as a film, however rudimentary. The second set of stills, which the actor took, is far more interesting than the first, which I took. I was a slave of the film's construction, but the actor was free, so his are much richer and more mysterious than mine. And the set that I took is foreshadowed by the same scenes presented in live-action, so it's not new material, but you're seeing the set that the actor took for the first time.

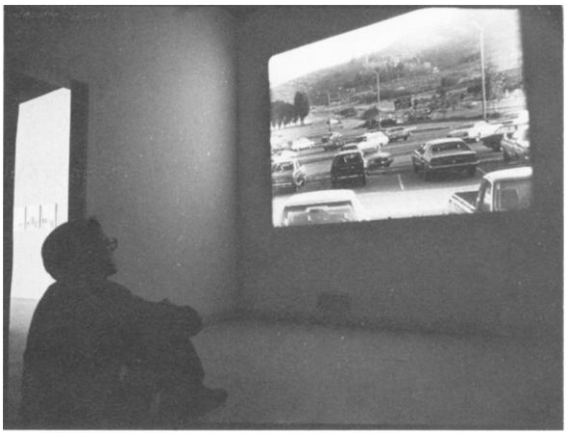
In fact, within the framework of the film the actor's choices of what to photograph came first, and determined the geography of the film. I and my assistant followed him with the movie camera. The film is built outward from his decisions, and yet the pictures he takes are the last thing the film shows you. Or to put it another way, the last sequence gives you the reverse angles that are implied by the earlier seg-

ment where we take the pictures. Sometimes you see the actor pointing his camera off-screen, but then you don't get the reverse angle, which according to the law of classical narrative editing would be the next shot. Instead the film saves up all the reverse angles and gives them to you at the end. You do finally get the information, but drastically postponed from the moment when by convention you would receive it. So the film disobeys the law of the reverse angle, but in so doing it conforms to another conventional device of narrative construction, that of suspense: you are caused to want information, the information is withheld from you as you wonder how and when it will be given to you, then you're told, and it's over. So *The Director* . . . acknowledges one part of the conventions of narrative even while it works against another part.

I'm intrigued by Screening Room, *which I've read about but never seen. There too the conceptual design seems more nearly the work than any specific enactment of it.*

I would put it the opposite way, that the full import of the underlying idea can be grasped only by seeing the concrete and topical qualities of any correctly executed version or, to use the word I prefer, state. Or even better, the film can best be understood by seeing two different states, so that despite their depicting different places, you see how in principle they are both the same film.

Screening Room is a special case of normal theatrical projection. It's best when it's done for a conventional movie theater, with a proscenium arch, a raked floor, fixed seats, and a projection booth. It starts with a title card, it has a beginning, a middle, and an end, and it relies on normal projection. So in those respects it's a conventional film that's meant to function within the situation of classical projection, but it's also about the limits of that situation. It lies just short of the point where regular projection passes over into an installation-like situation. The film consists of a tracking shot into the theater where the film is going to be shown. As the camera enters the empty theater, the projector is on, but without film in it, so that on the screen there's just a rectangle of flickering white light. The camera stops at the back of the theater, then centers that rectangle. And then there's a slow zoom into the center of the



Installation view, SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

screen. When you're watching the film, you recognize that you are approaching the very building in which you are sitting as you watch this image, and then you see the interior of the theater itself, and finally, as the camera zooms into the empty rectangle of light, representation is dissolved into material. The convergence between the picture of the space and the actual space transforms illusion into object. I made the film for the first time in 1968, and of course it has to be not remade, but made again for each different place it's shown. Each state is materially a different piece of film that registers a different image at a different time, but it's always the same film because the organizing principle, the spatial syntax, is in each instance the same. And because each state is specific to a particular location, the film can be shown only there, and of course never broadcast on television. The title card of the film always includes an announcement to that effect, specifying the one place it can be shown and prohibiting broadcast, like a legal notice.

Production Stills *defies conventional distinctions. It's one continuous take, and yet we see a series of Polaroids, each of which contains information that is comparable to a shot. We know it's a color film, since the hand that comes into the frame is color, but since everything else is in black-and-white, we tend to forget about the color when the hand is absent.*

That's the method of the film, contrast, or, if you like, contradiction. The same thing is true of how the space is treated. The camera's field of view is extremely shallow and extremely small. What you're looking at is a piece of cellotex that's about two feet in front of the camera, and the field of view about four inches by six inches. The stills are introduced one after

the other into this tiny space, and they offer a progressive revelation of the much larger space that, as the sound track has already told you, has been there all along. And in contradiction to the sharply confined visual space in front of the camera, you're aware of an acoustical space that is extensive, a good part of a sound stage.

Were you taking the pictures yourself?

No. I wanted to question the conventional ideas of authorship in film-making by showing that it was possible to make a film that was my own even while giving up control over every detail of how the frame looks. Within the limitations that the photographs had to be production stills, the photographer, Thom Andersen, was free to interpret the situation as he chose. The ostensible subject of the film is production stills, but the specific topical details that the stills show, their texture, the visual sensibility and thought that they embody—what the film gives you to look at, in other words—were all determined by someone else. As you suggest, the series of stills are shots that amount to a movie, but its director wasn't me, it was Thom Andersen. I was just the producer. But I did in fact take the last photograph, so that Thom would appear in the film.

All your films strike me as being very witty, and sometimes very funny, in a subtle way. In Production Stills *there's this incredible array of equipment, and instead of being directed toward some extravaganza, with lavish sets and a cast of thousands, it's trained on a piece of cellotex and some black-and-white Polaroids.*

Again, it's contradiction; an industry production of a non-industry film. It's a deliberate under-utilization of the equipment. The film's refusal of production values and its visual penury could be proposed as an oblique allusion to other kinds of penury in the products of the industry.

In Picture and Sound Rushes *you seem to suggest that sync sound is the primary situation of film.*

It has always been an axiom with me that sync sound is the basic condition of motion pictures.

You mean in terms of their primary effect on audiences?

I mean that's what film *is,* the recording of image and sound in synchronization. Some independent film-makers regard sync with suspicion, but as far as I can see for no other reason than that it's the foundation of commercial film-making. My own choice in the matter is plain: you can use the technical attributes and resources of commercial film-making while refusing to fall in with the uses to which those techniques and resources are customarily put. In fact you can use them to illuminate and criticize industry practice itself. I find that choice preferable to letting the industry drive you into reaction. Why, because the industry depends on sync, should you feel that the technique has been preempted, that you have no choice but to make a silent film? That's not making a choice, that's letting a choice be taken away from you, retreating before an assertion of cultural and economic power and trying to make a virtue of it. And as if that distinction in and of itself could enable you to claim a substantive difference or a kind of purity. It is a difference, but not necessarily a substantive one. And although silent film is certainly simpler, it is not, by any historical or technical standard, purer. The reaction against sync is a particularly pernicious form of entrapment because it means that you are almost automatically accepting consignment to a minority practice. And the effectiveness of minority practice and its place in the larger world are serious questions. I'm all for film at the level of the personal and the poetic, but these questions do need to be thought about. The unhappy fact is that it's much more expensive to shoot sync than silent, not just twice as expensive but several times more so. So it's tempting to make silent films for economic reasons alone, which is the worst reason of all. It's not an assertion of creative freedom, but an acceptance of being reduced to the margin. I do acknowledge that there have been great silent films made within the last twenty years. They are able to defeat the possibility of sound; although silent, they are whole films. I'm thinking, of course, of Brakhage and some of the structuralists. But these film-makers do not have illusions about their audience.

As the industry has shown, sync is an extremely powerful technique. And it is not necessarily tainted merely because the industry has relied so heavily on it. Why acquiesce in the industry's claim on it? Why give up so easily, and for poor reasons? Better to reclaim it, so that it can be redeemed, and enlisted in the

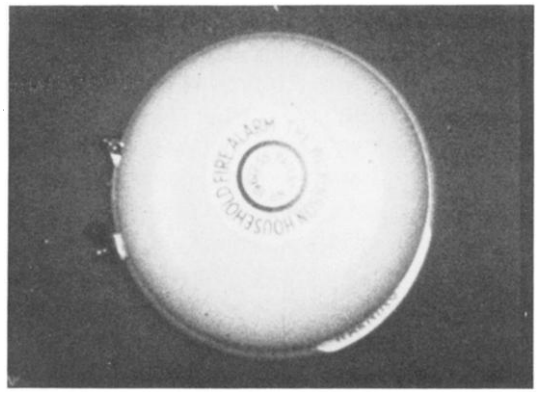
cause of other ways of thinking and other values.

For a long time there was an assumption that film and language didn't belong together. Murnau tried to eliminate intertitles, film-makers were criticized for being literary, and so on. But it seems implicit in your work that language is as much an automatic part of the system as sound is. In many of your films there's a printed text. Sometimes it's very obvious, as it is in The Wilkinson Household Fire Alarm *and* Projection Instructions, *and sometimes it's very subtle, as in* Cue Rolls: *other than those moments when the white leader moves through, everything in* Cue Rolls *seems completely still, except that we can see that the footage counter is moving; we can't read it, but we know that it's a text, if only in the most rudimentary sense, and this tiny textual motion alters our understanding of what we see. The xeroxes of the maltese cross in* 240x *are also a kind of text, as is the face of the clock in* Phi Phenomenon. *Even the unusually long titles of* The Director and His Actor Look at Footage Showing Preparations for an Unmade Film (2) *and* The Wilkinson Household Fire Alarm—*the film is only one and a half minutes long—draw further attention to language.*

It's asking a lot of a simple word like "text" to comprehend all those different instances, and I don't know about your suggestion that what you call text is comparable to language, or at least implies it. But nonetheless your observation is basically correct. I feel that language, in the strict sense, absolutely belongs in film. And you're correct in saying that my insistence on language parallels my insistence on sound. One implies the other; they go together. Like sound, especially sync sound, language is a resource, an extremely powerful one. Why renounce it? A flight from language is the same thing as a flight from sound into silence and has the same consequences. Declining to use language means you accept the use that others make of it. Why deprive yourself of a voice?

The text of Projection Instructions *creates a three-way relationship. By reading the text on the screen—the orders* you *are giving—our attention is focused on the projectionist.*

It's really not me giving the instructions, it's the piece of celluloid in the projector, whose shadow the projectionist is looking at. But



WILKINSON FIRE ALARM, *by Morgan Fisher*

you're right that the audience is made aware of the projectionist. That's really one of the points of the film. And furthermore I think the audience's awareness is sympathetic, not the hostile kind that occurs when a conventional film is out of focus or there's a sloppy reel change. On those occasions the projectionist is regarded as nothing more than some anonymous mechanic who's failing to do his job. But in the case of *Projection Instructions,* I think the audience is in sympathy with the projectionist because he's perceived as being tyrannized by the film's unrelenting demands. At bottom, the film is simply a score, and the projectionist is the person who performs it. The audience is watching a performance where they can see the score at the same time that they see the performer's interpretation of it. But the film reverses the usual relation between score and performer: the score is visible, but the performer, enclosed in the projection booth, is not. And even if there's no booth, the performer is still behind the audience instead of in front of it.

In *Projection Instructions* I wanted to play against the idea of the visual as the essential attribute of film. All you see are words, and all you hear are words. Like *The Wilkinson Household Fire Alarm,* it's a case of redundancy, but still more literal and hyperbolic: the words on the screen are exactly the same as the words on the track. Yet it's a work that could be realized only as a film, and it's a very film film.

Above all, the film raises questions about the projector as the last in the succession of machines through which film comes to us. A lot of attention has been given to the camera as an

interpretive instrument. But the projector has remained enshrined as an objective, almost scientific, instrument. Normal projection is a hidden assumption even in the few examples of avant-garde work that have taken projection as a subject, where, for example, the projector serves as a device that extrudes light or inflects the space through which the beam passes before it strikes the screen. Even then, the projector's autonomy as a mechanism that functions of itself remains inviolable. There's obviously nothing wrong with conventional projection, but still I found it strange that work of every kind, including advanced work, relies on correct projection. I wanted to see what could be done by bringing that standard into question: there is no one correct way to show *Projection Instructions.* It is, so to speak, an objective film, one that gives the projectionist the chance to be an interpretive artist.

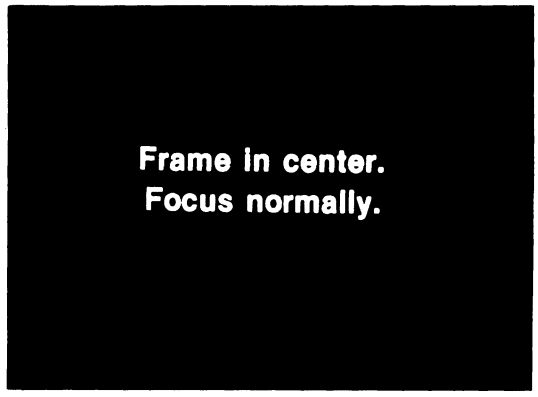
In two films—Picture and Sound Rushes *and* Documentary Footage—*we don't actually see a text, but we see someone read one.*

In *Picture and Sound Rushes* I wasn't reading a text, I was improvising from notes. That accounts for my awkward delivery. Some people think it's just hilarious, but however embarrassing it is to me, my performance gives the film a pathos that contrasts with the rigidity of its timetable format. In *Documentary Footage* the woman first reads a list of questions into a tape recorder, then plays back the questions and improvises her answers to them. One way the film achieves its effect is through the interplay between the questions, which are brief and exact and come at regular intervals, and her spontaneous answers.

But *Documentary Footage* and *Picture and Sound Rushes* are similar, in that both of them set a task for a subject within a closely controlled situation, and then record the subject's performance, like a scientific experiment. They draw from psychological testing and instrumentation photography, even to the extent that in both of them there's a timer.

There are wonderful moments in Documentary Footage. *Did you direct the woman in any way?*

Not at all, except to the extent that I composed the scheme for the film, and she created her performance in response to it. In the second half of the film, there was an alternation



PROJECTION INSTRUCTIONS, *by Morgan Fisher*

between questions and opportunities to answer them. So there were open spaces within which she was free to respond, and she filled them with her own inventions, with herself, really. She rehearsed operating the equipment and moving to her mark, but that was all. She knew in advance that the questions would be about physical appearance, but she didn't actually see them until the shot began. Then she was on her own for eleven minutes. She did things with her face and gestures that a director could never imagine, much less achieve through building and controlling a performance. I had total confidence in her, and she gave a brilliant performance. She had real star quality. In that respect it's a conventional film. I wanted to do it on the first take—that was related to the idea of accepting her performance as she gave it—and that's what happened. We did a second take for protection, but she had given everything to her first performance. I got the second take developed, but never had it workprinted.

She goes through a complete change in body language and mood, and everything has to do with her position with regard to language.

I would say that your observation is literally correct. Her performance is shaped by where the language is coming from or where it's being directed, that is, who she thinks is asking the questions and to whom she in turn addresses her answers. The questions come back to her from the tape recorder in her own voice, but the author of the questions is me, so the interrogator has a compound identity. Partly as a result of that, she directs her answers to different listeners: herself on the tape, me on the tape as the author of the questions, the tape recorder itself, the camera, me operating the camera,

and sometimes the audience that she nows will ultimately see the film, as if it's asking the questions. These shifts give her performance a lot of its energy and charm.

One last question: many film-makers are deeply—I'd say obsessively, but there is *a serious problem here—involved in protecting their prints from damage. When I asked you the other night whether I had scratched* The Wilkinson Household Fire Alarm, *you didn't seem particularly concerned.*

How can you fetishize a print? I mean, people do, but you have to fight against it, otherwise you live in fear. A brand-new print is one thing, but the print you mentioned is ten years old. After all, it's the nature of movies that they wear out. They're presented to us by a machine that sooner or later destroys them.

Reviews

SID AND NANCY

Director: Alex Cox. Producer: Eric Fellner. Script: Cox and Abbe Wool. Photography: Roger Deakins. Samuel Goldwyn Company.

When there is no future
How can there be sin
We are the flowers in the dustbin
We are the poison in your human machine
(The Sex Pistols, "God Save The Queen")

Sid and Nancy, Alex Cox's second feature after *Repo Man,* is not a film about the Sex Pistols, nor does it intend to be a redeeming portrayal of the early punk scene; it is, as I shall discuss later, a love story. Yet, *Sid and Nancy* is also the first commercially and critically successful film whose main characters wear the insignia of punk subculture.[1] Thus far, only a few narrative films (*Liquid Sky, Smithereens, Suburbia*) and documentaries (*D.O.A., The Decline of Western Civilization*) had punk protagonists, but their appeal was restricted to a specific audience. True, punk-looking characters have been used and abused in mainstream cinema, just as a punk image has been purified and coopted by dominant fashion. In these films, however, the presence of punks merely entailed a touch of ominous color (*A Werewolf in London, After Hours*) or signified the bad boys' iconography (*Road Warrior, Superman II*). At best, punks were secondary figures whose significance ranged from demented rebellion (*Repo Man*) to ill-fated resistance against a nightmare society (*Blade Runner*). Hence, as a real-life story about two people somehow involved in the original punk movement, *Sid and Nancy* is bound to raise the question of punk's role and representation.

Making a film about real events and actual people is like making a film about a famous novel: there is an original to be respected and there will always be those who, knowing the text and perhaps even liking it, will be disappointed at the cinematic adaptation. *Sid and Nancy* will inevitably be received in different ways depending on whether or not the spectator is familiar and/or sympathetic with punk music and subculture. The initiates are very likely to be irritated by the underrepresentation of punk music's liberating effect and by the distortion of Johnny Rotten. Indeed, Cox's film fails to show the extent to which punk generated an angry negativity that was both understandable and not recuperable into dominant ideology. Johnny Lydon, formerly Rotten, is the perfect example of how punk anger did not always entail complete self-destruction; and *Sid and Nancy*'s portrayal of Rotten is, yes, inadequate. *D.O.A.*, the only documentary with footage of the Sex Pistols' stormy US tour, shows a different picture from Cox's, with Johnny at the peak of his mesmerizing power and Sid and Nancy making fools of themselves.[2]Undoubtedly, an accurate representation of Rotten's nihilist charisma was no easy task; still, the initiated viewer cannot help feeling that *Sid and Nancy* could have done better.

Clearly, Cox and co-writer Abbe Wool were more interested in forcing the spirit of punk upon non-initiates—arguably the majority of the public—than in celebrating its worth for those who already know it.[3] As a virulent transgression to all norms, punk was both irredeem-

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Clearly, Cox and co-writer Abbe Wool were more interested in forcing the spirit of punk upon non-initiates—arguably the majority of the public—than in celebrating its worth for those who already know it.[3] As a virulent transgression to all norms, punk was both irredeem-

able and ambivalent. Those who have seen *D.O.A.* will notice that Sid Vicious used to wear a swastika T-shirt (not so much a Nazi statement as yet another proof of his irresponsible need for provocation at all costs), whereas in *Sid and Nancy* he wears one with hammer and sickle. By switching T-shirts, Cox does not intend to help the leftist ideas he himself espouses. Rather, he suggests that at one point, punk could go either way. To put it differently, he hints at punk's ambivalence, at its openness to extreme appropriations. And if ambivalence and irredeemability indeed are essential traits of punkdom, then we must praise Cox's ability in making the non-initiates *feel* them as a result of *Sid and Nancy*'s portrayal of love and death.

With its youth-comedy tempo and humor, the first half of the film leads the audience to laugh at the protagonists' wacky romance. Spectators let their guards down, so to speak, and by the time *Sid and Nancy* hits the road to despair, it is too late for anybody to withdraw. Having no other choice but to identify with the characters privileged by the camera, those viewers who do not leave the theater experience a deep sense of depression and anger, especially since Sid and Nancy are junkies and the drug scare is in. Yet, says Owen Gleiberman, "Sid and Nancy's feelings for each other may have mingled disastrously with heroin addiction, but what they had, at bottom (at least as Cox portrays it), was a conventionally obsessive love/hate relationship, and that's exactly what's moving about it."[4] In effect, the audience gets depressed and implodes because *Sid and Nancy* is a relationship film that is not willing to comply with the expectations triggered and fulfilled by most films. Cox is very clear about this: "In love there is so much of tripping your partner out, laying traps for them, and putting them in difficult situations to test them. There is an awful lot of very strange and insane stuff attendant to being in love that normally doesn't get dealt with in films."[5] Thus, like *Empire of Passion, Last Tango in Paris, Bad Timing,* and more recently *Blue Velvet* and *Something Wild, Sid and Nancy* shows the hardness of love and forces us to acknowledge—and we may not like this—the inseparability of passion and destruction, eros and thanatos.

It may be argued that *Sid and Nancy* does not show the good side of love, but this would

Gary Oldman as Sid Vicious: SID AND NANCY

be imposing our ideas of what relationships should look like. If we keep in mind the "no feelings" context, we will recover love's tracks in several scenes. When Sid bashes his head against a wall so as to impress Nancy—whose hands are bleeding from punching it—we feel the tenderness of a courtship ritual. Or when Nancy is ready to leave Sid's bed after their first lovemaking and he restrains her from going, then we sense the rise of that dependency called passion. Their relationship has all the potential of being overpowering, for there is an astounding similarity to their personalities. Sid is childishly enamored with his own image, Nancy is the whining child who knows only the pleasure principle. They both lack peripheral vision and want everything *now.* In addition, they are both attracted by extremes: when she asks him to kiss her toes, a dominatrix command, he complies with her desire but in so doing rips her stocking. In sum, *Sid and Nancy* is about love between two really similar people, the kind of love which disregards utilitarian concerns and becomes a mutually exalting experience that brings about the lovers' isolation against the world.

It is a kind of love that becomes a myth-founding experience. During the police attack against the participants in the renowned boat episode, we witness the first instance of *Sid and Nancy*'s mythical streak, for their "cruising through the chaos and away, wrapped around each other" is not realistic.[6] The sequence ends with the synch sound off and a musical crescendo, the whole suggesting that in a sense they are no longer part of their surroundings. Then there are the slow-motion sequences, such as the kiss amidst falling garbage or Nancy's

Self-portrait of Futurist Fortunato Depero (1915)

fascinated stare at the fire in the bedroom: more leaps from realism into myth. And of course the entire final sequence, with the unlikely pizza joint in the debris and the yellow cab taking them away. In all these scenes we are asked to suspend our disbelief, forget the true story and deploy a mythical gaze; the mythical gaze that alone can uncover the beauty of passion's destructiveness and place Sid and Nancy on the altar of eternal love's icons.

And love in want of eternity kills. "Love Kills" was the title Cox had in mind, "but for bullshit legalistic reasons the film may end up being called *Sid and Nancy*—which is just too bad."[7] "Love kills" is the line spoken by Nancy to a friend of hers who suggested that leaving Sid would probably do her good. By powerfully highlighting eros's counterpart, Cox and Wool give a romantic interpretation to the muddled theories surrounding the death of the actual Nancy Spungen. In the film, her knifing takes place while the two hurl themselves against each other, and we are never led to believe that her death was just the squalid result of junkies' frenzy. In fact, the subject of common suicide had already come up, and although Nancy seems more adamant in the pursuit of a terminal happiness, Sid too hints at their imminent ends when, asked by her grandfather about his intentions, he says that they "will go out in a blaze of glory." As Nancy's character grows in stature and demands that we, perhaps unwillingly, respect her death-wish, so does the film seem to imply that a person somehow knows when it is time to leave life, when all has been given. Thus, *Sid and Nancy* not only shows the nasty side of love but also brings up the hot issue of suicide which, as the ultimate self-destruction, constitutes the recognition of ideology's disintegration and counters the fundamental mandate of bourgeois society, namely self-preservation, the self as capital to be accrued and accumulated. The romanticizing of their suicides does more than putting love and death on the same level; it focuses a blaze of glory upon self-inflicted death.[8]

By forcing all these uncomfortable thoughts and feelings upon non-initiated viewers, Cox's film manages to maintain punk's spirit alive, in spite of its distortions. Moreover, to a closer look, the film even reveals a subtext which simultaneously enriches Cox's observations about punk and constitutes *Sid and Nancy*'s self-conscious dimension. In order to adequately analyze this intriguing subtext, I shall now consider *Sid and Nancy*'s treatment of the media.

In *The Great Rock and Roll Swindle,* a "rockumentary" never released in the US, Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren portrayed the band's success as the result of his astute exploitation of the media. Although aware that McLaren's cynicism was itself "a role, an image he wanted to be received as," Cox offers us a splendid portrayal of McLaren as the hovering, evil genius who detects and exploits Sid's potential as "a metaphor, a symbol of the dementia of a nihilistic generation."[9] However, some crucial changes from the script suggest that Cox intended to add more substance to *Sid and Nancy's* portrayal of the media's role. Unlike the script, the film includes the notorious incident of the Sex Pistols swearing on the Thames Television Bill Grundy Show as well as a TV interview with Johnny Rotten while Sid and Nancy are walking out of their bedroom in search of drugs. But there's more.

The harrowing realism of *Sid and Nancy*'s prolonged portrayal of self-destructiveness ends with a highly symptomatic shot after which the film gently veers towards its final and somewhat glorious epiphany. Prison bars fill the screen in the foreground and Sid is lying behind them, "hunched up foetally. Cold turkey."[10] Suddenly a beam of light exposes his face on the

floor, his mouth spewing withdrawal froth. No sooner do his eyes roll up to face the audience than we hear two voices off: "Is that him?" asks the first. "Yes, that's him," replies the second, which, after a brief pause, utters in a contemptuous and triumphant tone: "Sid Vicious." This scene differs considerably from the script, in which a guard was just supposed to say: "You're out of here, punk. Somebody paid the fifty grand." Since we never see the owners of the voices, their words sound like an aural caption aimed at us: the monkey-on-the-back man is exposed at last. Indeed, this shot epitomizes Cox's awareness that the image of punks was unduly paraded by a society that, thanks to mechanical reproduction, has perfected its habit of defining its good self-image by means of freak shows.

Sid and Nancy's self-conscious freak show ought to be seen in the light of several twentieth-century artistic movements characterized by an equally self-conscious destructiveness: Futurism, Dada, Lettrists, Situationists.[11] Punks may have lacked the education required to be actually heard in the higher spheres of discourse, but they certainly acted as if driven by the awareness of what their more sophisticated predecessors had theorized: we live in "the society of the spectacle," a society in which "the commodity has achieved a total occupation of social life" and "capital has reached such a degree of accumulation that it becomes an image."[12] Cox repeatedly hints at the pervasiveness of the spectacular by filling the film with TV sets. All the bedroom scenes have a TV on and occasionally the viewer is invited to seek connections between what appears respectively on the small and the large screen (e.g., the cartoons when Sid is arrested may suggest that Sid and Nancy have terminated what Chambers called "their own horror comic script in New York City."[13] In one case Sid and Nancy are watching a TV on which we see a line of people in front of the "Analytical Laboratories;" then we cut to a scene revealing Sid and Nancy as part of that very line and the "Laboratories" as the methadone clinic. Although implying that no distinction between reality and spectacle can be upheld, *Sid and Nancy* does not yield to the elitist nostalgia for a world without TVs. In this respect, Cox's film is not an indictment of television *à la Ginger and Fred;* rather, it is a mere statement of fact: just as the commodity form has practically colonized all areas of human existence, so does the omnipresent spectacle cast people in the role of consumers of images and their captions.

And it is in this society that Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen literally made spectacles of themselves in the attempt to go beyond the roles of mere spectators. As Cox says, Sid "started out seeing himself as the personification of punkdom" and "he was as famous in his own mind when he invented the pogo in 1976 as when he did 'My Way.' He was a legend in his own mind when he was at the 100 Club, before he was even in a band."[14] Sid, in other words, wants to be an image and does it his way. In effect, Sid's version of "My Way," which Cox literally copies from *The Great Rock and Roll Swindle,* reveals the extent to which Sid Vicious quite contradictorily sought success in the very world punks were attacking: show biz.

This treatment of the spectacular in *Sid and Nancy* constitutes the subtext which, as I said earlier, has a twofold effect. First, it shows that "Sid and Nancy weren't representative punks at all. They were really fucked up and they would have been fucked up if they were living in New Jersey or in the suburbs."[15] Second, by denouncing the slipperiness of any idea of reality vs. representation, Cox is in fact warning us about the liberties he took in his version of the facts. Although telling a "true story" and in spite of much realistic detail, his film is an interpretation of an already constructed icon.

Given Cox's self-consciousness about the spectacle, it is hardly a surprise that both of his films to date have a similar beginning, with a character being questioned by the police and refusing to answer. It is as if he wanted to signify his reluctance to entering the spectacle. It is, in other words, a sign of punk's "rhetoric and practice" which "was largely built around an absence, a refusal to be defined."[16] Significantly, Cox does not make final statements nor does he relegate his authorial voice within one single character; rather, he disperses it throughout the text in suggestive ways. The most often repeated word in the film—besides "fuck"—is "boring," and "boredom," this Baudelearian key word, was indeed the feeling which punks detected not only in themselves but in a society whose only future would be "a shop-

ping scheme."[17] Then, we have the walls: for example, the first spark of mutual recognition between Sid and Nancy takes place against a wall on which we read the graffiti: "Abortion = keep it legal." Or, a few minutes later, we see a cop's car arriving against the background of a poster saying: "Labour is not working." Finally, punks characterized themselves as the niggers of the world and openly identified with black British and West Indian culture; and the only non-punk characters in the film who show some constructive sympathy with Sid and Nancy are blacks.[18] In fact, the caseworker at the methadone clinic can even be considered a spokesman for the "best" aspect of punk, for he denounces the government's interest in the diffusion of smack—"smack is the great controller"—and suggests that Sid and Nancy "could be sellin' healthy anarchy. But as long as you're addicts YOU'LL BE FULL OF SHIT."[19] Then there is the old black cop who seems to take to heart Sid's case upon his leaving the prison. And of course the three little black kids at the end who invite Sid to dance and tell him: "Stop being so stuck up!"

Stop being so stuck up. *Sid and Nancy* is an important film not so much for how it says what it says as for what it can do. I have shown how a critical discourse on the film cannot avoid facing questions that haunt our culture. Furthermore, by obliquely opening punk's can of worms in the face of mainstream cinema, Cox's film may suggest that there is an obvious parallel between the deconstruction of binary oppositions and of meta-historical teleologies on the one hand and the "no future" distrust for the traditional Left and Right on the other. It may suggest that the sense of crisis and loss of credibility circulating in post-modern analyses *à la* Baudrillard is indeed echoed by punks' illiterate declarations of doom and gloom. In fact, it may force us to take seriously the declaration of Slava Tsukerman (the director of *Liquid Sky*): "Subcultures are what moves the world ahead."[20] And, by forcing us to quote Johnny Rotten in critical discourse, *Sid and Nancy* writes on our walls: STOP BEING SO STUCK UP.

—MAURIZIO VIANO

NOTES

1. I am assuming commercial success by the fact that *Sid and Nancy* is being held over two months in New York and Boston. As to critical success, Owen Gleiberman (*Boston Phoenix,* 11/11/86), John Powers (*American Film,* November 1986), Todd McCarthy (*Film Comment,* October 1986) and David Edelstein (*The Village Voice,* 10/21/86) speak of the film in enthusiastic terms. With respect to the meaning of punk as a subculture, see Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979) to which my article is heavily indebted.

2. A relevant side-effect of *Sid and Nancy* is the re-release of *D.O.A.* for all those who want to know more. As to Johnny Lydon, it may be useful to remember that, after the Sex Pistols' breakup, he formed Public Image Ltd., a post-punk band characterized by vitriolic sound and words. Interestingly, their latest album is called *Album* and has a cover reminiscent of *Repo Man*'s generic food cans.

3. For brevity's sake Wool's name will no longer appear in my article, but it should be kept in mind throughout. For a preliminary assessment of her role and of her working relationship with Cox, see the introduction to the published script, *Sid and Nancy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), pp. 7–11. It is rather common for the initiates to think of punk in terms of a "spirit," an "attitude" (instead of a specific way of playing music). See, for example, the way in which the soft-sounding, young band Jesus and Mary Chain speak of themselves as having a "punk attitude" in *New Musical Express,* 2/16/85, pp. 22–3. Of course, this way of thinking is echoed by Cox himself when, talking about his film, he says, "I hope that the spirit of it is correct more than the detail," in *Film Comment,* October 1986, p. 38.

4. *Boston Phoenix,* 11/11/86, section three, p. 2.

5. *Film Comment,* October 1986, p. 37.

6. See the script, p. 47.

7. See the script, p. 2. It may be worth quoting in its entirety a passage from Buñuel's *My Last Sigh* which is reproduced at the opening of the script: "In the 1920s, when I was living in the Residencia there was a double suicide in Madrid. A student and his young fiancée killed themselves in a restaurant garden. They were known to be passionately in love; their families were on excellent terms with each other; and when an autopsy was performed, the girl was found to be a virgin. . . . So why the double suicide? I still don't have the answer, except that perhaps a truly passionate love, a sublime love that's reached a certain peak of intensity, is simply incompatible with life itself. Perhaps it's too great, too powerful. Perhaps it can exist only in death."

8. Of course, there will be moralists claiming that Sid and Nancy's lives were worthless anyway, thus failing to pick up this theme. A good example of such insensitivity is offered by Stephen Harvey who (*Film Comment,* December 86, pp. 52–3) wants "to thank Sid and Nancy for dying for us, because I had to go to a nice party at the Puck Building, where the guacamole was real good." The contempt with which this guardian of good values speaks about Sid and Nancy ("freaktoids," "plasmamorphs") reveals the extent to which *Sid and Nancy* is an acid test bringing out the worst side in the healthy, moral majorities. In fact, with the suicide rate on the rise in a society whose ideological legitimacy is disintegrating and which is irresponsibly aiming at prolonging biological life, the individual's right to die may very well turn out to be one of the last *political* battles to be fought. Perhaps it is no accident that two widely different magazines such as *Life* (December 86, "The Liberation of Lolly and Gronky," pp. 71–94) and *New Musical Express* (11/8/86, "Sing Me To Sleep," pp. 22–4) carry articles about this issue.

9. See Cox's interview with Owen Gleiberman in the *Boston Phoenix,* 11/11/86, section three, p. 3.

10. For this entire scene, see script p. 135.

11. In his excellent *Urban Rhythms* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985, p. 181), Iain Chambers argues that punk was "anti-art in intention" and "adopted a politics of cultural aesthetics" which, "denying the prevailing sense of 'class' and 'politics,' offered a most explicit social radicalism." "McLaren's inspired management of punk's leading group," continues Chambers, "has often been linked to the Dada-inspired logic of the International Situationists." If Futurists were high-class intellectuals, punks resemble the vulgar

lumpen-proletariat: the road from Futurism (or the precedent iconoclastic movements such as the Italian Scapigliatura whose themes and self-images are stunningly close to those of many punks' songs) to punk is therefore the road from high culture to popular culture, from the restricted access to the means of cultural production to the present possibility for independent projects. Also, it is the road from modernist faith in the future to a post-modern conviction that there is no future.

12. Guy Debord, *The Society Of The Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983). There are no page numbers, the entire book being a collection of 'theses': my quotes are taken respectively from theses 42 and 35.
13. Iain Chambers, op. cit. p. 249.
14. See Cox's interview with Owen Gleiberman.
15. See Abbe Wool's declarations in the script, p. 10. Penelope Spheeris's portrayal of punks in *Suburbia* stresses their TV addiction to even a larger extent than Sid and Nancy.
16. See Chambers, p. 184.
17. Both Chambers and Hebdige deal extensively with punk's concern with "boredom." "Your future is a shopping scheme" is a line from the Sex Pistols's song *Anarchy In The UK*. A suggestive link between Romero's *Dawn of the Dead,* with its shopping mall scenes, and a punk vision could be argued and explored, especially since horror seems to be punks' favorite film genre. Of course, a peculiar kind of "boredom" and absence of future oozes from Jim Jarmusch's films, which have no punks in them but are certainly representative of a punk spirit.
18. For a convincing assessment of the relationship between blacks and punks, see Hebdige's chapters 2–4. Another recent film using blacks in very much the same way (and more extensively) is *Something Wild.*
19. Capitalized in the script.
20. "Think of the hippies of the '60's. Who took them seriously at first? But the whole world changed: relations between people became more informal, there was the sexual revolution, the hippie style became everyone's style. . . . And punks are indeed an exaggeration of contemporary reality. They bring it to the point of paradox." See "An Interview With Slava Tsukerman," in *Third Rail,* n. 7, 1985/6, pp. 92–3.

THE FLY

Directed by David Cronenberg. Screenplay by Charles Edward Pogue and David Cronenberg. Production Designer: Carol Spier. The Fly created and designed by Chris Walas, Inc. Producer: Stuart Cornfeld. Photography: Mark Irwin. Music: Howard Shore. Twentieth Century-Fox.

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The Fly was one of the choicer specimens. Produced and directed by Kurt Neumann, a veteran fabricator of medium-budget marquee filler, and adapted for the screen by James Clavell, the future publishing phenom, from George Langelaan's short story, it was less a monster mash than a mystery romance, a deliberate mood piece that took its madcap premise—the melding of man and insect during a "matter transmission" experiment—quite seriously. Rendered mostly in flashback, the action revolves around the steadfast devotion of wife Helene (Patricia Owens) to her transfigured scientist husband André (Al Hedison), an anguished ministry climaxed by her complicity in his drill-press suicide. By 1950s standards, and especially in retrospect, *The Fly* was a model of restraint and suggestion. During "feedings" the victim-scientist keeps his hideous head concealed beneath a black hood and communicates, heartbreakingly, through chalked messages on a blackboard. Save for a telltale buzzing on the sound track, it could pass for a straight police procedural—with the exception of two key scenes. In one, the long-delayed moment of exposure, the scientist's bug-eyed head is revealed, whereupon a fly point-of-view shot catches the screeching Helene, frozen in a kind of kaleidoscopic amber, in simultaneous multiple images. In the other, the famous finish, a miniscule fly/man, encaked in webbing, screams "Help me! Help me!" in a piercing castrato as a spider bears down on him. Nothing in the perfunctory sequels (*Return of the Fly* [1959] and *Curse of the Fly* [1965]) left quite so enduring an impression.

Anyway, David Cronenberg was impressed. Perhaps Canada's best-regarded film-maker, the great auteur hope of the Great White North well remembers the horror and hoopla of the weirdie original. "At the time there was a $500 reward if you could prove that the transference of heads between man and fly couldn't happen," he recalls in the production notes to his version of *The Fly*. "Well, it was never explained how the heads changed sizes

lumpen-proletariat: the road from Futurism (or the precedent iconoclastic movements such as the Italian Scapigliatura whose themes and self-images are stunningly close to those of many punks' songs) to punk is therefore the road from high culture to popular culture, from the restricted access to the means of cultural production to the present possibility for independent projects. Also, it is the road from modernist faith in the future to a post-modern conviction that there is no future.

12. Guy Debord, *The Society Of The Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983). There are no page numbers, the entire book being a collection of 'theses': my quotes are taken respectively from theses 42 and 35.
13. Iain Chambers, op. cit. p. 249.
14. See Cox's interview with Owen Gleiberman.
15. See Abbe Wool's declarations in the script, p. 10. Penelope Spheeris's portrayal of punks in *Suburbia* stresses their TV addiction to even a larger extent than Sid and Nancy.
16. See Chambers, p. 184.
17. Both Chambers and Hebdige deal extensively with punk's concern with "boredom." "Your future is a shopping scheme" is a line from the Sex Pistols's song *Anarchy In The UK*. A suggestive link between Romero's *Dawn of the Dead,* with its shopping mall scenes, and a punk vision could be argued and explored, especially since horror seems to be punks' favorite film genre. Of course, a peculiar kind of "boredom" and absence of future oozes from Jim Jarmusch's films, which have no punks in them but are certainly representative of a punk spirit.
18. For a convincing assessment of the relationship between blacks and punks, see Hebdige's chapters 2–4. Another recent film using blacks in very much the same way (and more extensively) is *Something Wild.*
19. Capitalized in the script.
20. "Think of the hippies of the '60's. Who took them seriously at first? But the whole world changed: relations between people became more informal, there was the sexual revolution, the hippie style became everyone's style. . . . And punks are indeed an exaggeration of contemporary reality. They bring it to the point of paradox." See "An Interview With Slava Tsukerman," in *Third Rail,* n. 7, 1985/6, pp. 92–3.

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and that always bothered me as a kid. . . . Where did all the extra molecules and atoms come from to make a big fly head as opposed to the normal-sized fly head?" The local exhibitor welched on the deal, but Cronenberg, at once a most literal and subversively minded sort, gives the original's "scientific" conceit its due even as he imbues it with the venereal shivers that ripple throughout his oeuvre. Patched through the director's own transmission devices, *The Fly* fuses old-time science fiction with New Age sexual friction.

Whereas genre stalwarts like George Romero, Wes Craven, and Tobe Hooper go straight for the jugular, Cronenberg always hits below the belt. With remarkable consistency, the Cronenberg canon shows the cost to flesh of fantasy: the sexually transmitted parasites of *They Came from Within* (1975), the plague spread by the penile projection in the armpit of the insatiable Marilyn Chambers in *Rabid* (1977), the interuterine demons spawned by a psychotic Mom in *The Brood* (1979), and the video/in vitro violence of *Videodrome* (1983). Tellingly, Cronenberg's least successful horror film, *Scanners* (1981), is situated in space between the ears, not the legs: the telepathic detonation of a human head is surely a visual treat, but it has none of the unholy dread the director reserves for sexual couplings. In its warm linkage of eros and thanatos, a line of dialogue from *They Came from Within* conjures up Cronenbergian Romanticism: "He tells me that old flesh is erotic flesh, that disease is the love of two alien kinds of creatures for each other, that even dying is an act of eroticism." It could serve as an epigraph for *The Fly*.

At the outset at least, Cronenberg's update remains recognizably, if ironically, in the "weirdie" mold. Scientist Seth Brundle (Jeff Goldblum) concocts a teleportation device that "could change the world as we know it." Sniffing a good story and enticed by his clumsy come-ons, Veronica Quaife (Geena Davis), a luscious reporter for the *Omni*-like *Particle* magazine, follows Seth to his laboratory lair where he demonstrates his act in a set of "telepods" she aptly describes as "designer phone booths." Their relationship soon transgresses journalistic ethics, to the profound distaste of Veronica's dumped boyfriend and current

Jeff Goldblum and Geena Davis: THE FLY

editor, Stathis (John Getz). As in the original, science is tripped up by circumstance. A housefly intrudes undetected into a booth during Brundle's teleportation and in mid-zap the molecules of the two creatures interlock. This time the scientist isn't damned with anything so mundane as an instantaneous Gregor Samsa makeover, but rather an excruciatingly gradual metamorphosis, a genetic change from the inside out. Slowly, in progressively revolting detail and explicitness, Seth's corporeal and psychological "self" disintegrates and he becomes the 185-lb. "Brundlefly."

That process of transformation and decay gives *The Fly* its dramatic rhythm. Seth begins as the basic spacey researcher, so preoccupied with his work that, like Einstein, he keeps five identical outfits in the closet so as not to expend mental energy on fashion every morning. "You don't get out much, do you?" Veronica asks, a suspicion Seth confirms when he suggests they collaborate on a book about his project: "You don't have to worry about interfering with my life because I don't have any." Before the transforming power of love can take hold, however, Seth undergoes his own transformation in the telepods. He becomes a high-energy, whacked-out gymnast with a promethean sexual appetite, an intense sweet tooth, and a line of cosmic jive straight out of an early Cronenberg screenplay. In a hilarious monologue blathered at a befuddled Veronica, Seth waxes messianic about the "inherently purging," "purifying and cleansing" teleportation experience and vows to penetrate "beyond the pale of the flesh." Dubious about his "born-again teleportation

rap" and suspicious of the coarse hairs growing from his back, Veronica balks at her own baptism in the booths and falls out with Seth. Seth just falls apart—fingernails, teeth, ears—and comes down hard from his teleportation high. His final, tortuous transformation is a battle to retain his humanity while his human form decays—and for Veronica to acknowledge the man beneath the bug.

Seth copes with things as well as can be expected, retaining his inquisitive nature and sardonic style. He is certainly the most fully drawn, most believable character to yet appear in the Cronenberg gallery. As a dramatist, the director has had trouble with clever dialogue, credible motivation, and convincing characters, usually showing more feeling for monsters from the id than people from earth. His protagonists have too often played like the vessels for parasites and vehicles for polemics they so often were. Not until Christopher Walken in *The Dead Zone* (1983) did a Cronenberg protagonist evoke recognition, not to say sympathy. That the plight of the deteriorating Brundle is not simply horrific but tragic is a measure of the care taken in the piece-by-piece disassembly of an identifiable human being. It is also a tribute to the extraordinary performance of Jeff Goldblum, the gifted character actor who commands the emotional center: embalmed under vats of latex, his is a tortuous task, yet his eyes never stop registering desperation, compassion, terror. Not incidentally, *The Fly* is far and away the wittiest screenplay Cronenberg has worked from, full of snappy repartee, quotable throwaway lines, and telling gestures (when Veronica returns to her apartment to find the intrusive Stathis ensconced in her shower she shows her disgust by flushing the toilet—and scalding him.) One assumes that the contribution of co-writer Pogue was crucial.

As has been widely noted, the film's harrowing subtext is the AIDS epidemic, a visitation whose symptoms and spread seem uncomfortably in synch with long-time Cronenbergian forbodings. The association between the director's "venereal horror" films of the 1970s and the onset of AIDS in the 1980s was early observed by John Harkness in an article reprinted in *The Shape of Rage: The Films of David Cronenberg* (1983), a collection of criticism edited by Piers Handling. In the same volume, Robin Wood sensibly rejoined that any presumed "anticipatory" qualities in Cronenberg's work neither grants it an ex post facto value nor validates its sexual politics. But though a caution against the prophetic power of the artist is well taken, one cannot today watch *They Came from Within* or *Rabid* without a sense that these two sexual plague films have caught up with the sexual plague years, that Cronenberg's antennae were indeed tuned in to some early warning system. (When in *Rabid* the police are warned that the deadly contagious disease can be spread by saliva, the effect is truly eerie.) Though *The Fly* (wisely) foregoes any direct reference to its obvious real-life analogue, the presence of AIDS—that is, the presence of AIDS victims—lends a depth and tone more profound, more somber than Cronenberg's earlier elaborations on his perennial theme. Brundle's initial putrification—the blotches, sores, and boils that pockmark his skin—conjure the early stages of AIDS. Stathis's warning to Veronica is likewise all too familiar: harden your heart and avoid possible contagion. Instead, in sympathy, in comfort, in love, she takes Seth's stricken frame quite literally to heart and embraces him.

But only to a point. This would not be a Cronenberg film if sex did not mean, mainly, big trouble. It is Veronica's polymorphous sexuality that gives Seth the clue to cellular teleportation (he has to program the computer for tactile eroticism: "the flesh—it makes you crazy") and it is during a drunken jealous rage that he carelessly overlooks the insect in the telepod. Later, when Veronica (heretofore the sexual aggressor) can't match his sexual prowess, he prowls a bar (the jukebox is playing Bryan Ferry's theme "Help Me") and picks up a compliant partner. The undercurrent of danger and nastiness is caught in a representative Cronenberg moment, a metaphor for the irreconciliability of mind and body: in bed for the first time with Veronica, Seth rolls over onto a transistor which sticks into his back. Typically, only after sexual congress between the lovers becomes untenable does their relationship bloom into compassion and affirmation. Always, though, the

flesh leaves an unwholesome residue—especially for Veronica, in a nightmare pregnancy that erupts into the vilest obstetrics scene this side of *Humanoids from the Deep.*

Hovering on the edges of the action is Stathis, himself driven somewhat crazy by the flesh (Veronica's), who undergoes his own transformation. Veronica's relationship with her editor/ex is as fraught with complications as her commitment to Seth. Introduced as a "petty schmuck" and really a crass jerk of the first order, Stathis evolves into Veronica's advisor, comfort, and ultimate savior. It is an unlikely turnabout, a change seemingly dictated more by plot necessities than organic grounding.

Like Veronica, the viewer must face Brundle's decomposition straight on. By splatter, if not mainstream, standards, the gross-outs are fairly tame, softened always by the humor that is the usual safety value ("That's disgusting," admits Brundlefly when he regurgitates over his doughnut.) The production design, special effects work, make-up, and sundry other cinematic magic (notably a revolving room in which Brundlefly walks on the ceiling à la Astaire in *Royal Wedding*) is commensurate with the demands of a post-Industrial Light & Magic universe. Best of all is the creature concocted by Chris Walas (*Gremlins*) for Seth's last metamorphosis, a loathsome beastie beyond entomology who somehow registers his humanity in a terrible, pitiable plea to Veronica. Acknowledging him again, she complies with a final act of devotion, a gesture of love and death that closes *The Fly.*

—THOMAS DOHERTY

SHERMAN'S MARCH

Ross McElwee's documentary, *Sherman's March: A Meditation on the Possibility of Romantic Love in the South during an Era of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation,* is a remarkable film that combines a complex discussion of its own nature as a movie with an engaging account of the film-maker's journey through the South. McElwee sets out with his camera to retrace William Tecumseh Sherman's march to the sea, and along the way finds himself confronting the mysteries of Southern womanhood. Ditched by his girlfriend in New York as the film begins, McElwee meanders through the deep South, uncertain whether he is looking for love or vengeance.

Although McElwee's romantic misadventures en route are amusing, *Sherman's March* isn't just kidding about Sherman and his devastation of the South, or about nuclear fallout, its modern parallel. Contemplating the costs and the limitations of turning the camera on places and people one loves, the film takes Sherman as a figure for the film-maker. Sherman's war against the predominantly female civilian population of the Confederacy, as well as the possibility of nuclear war, are taken up as metaphors for the film-maker's project. In these recurring metaphors McElwee acknowledges his camera's capacity for doing violence to the women he films.

Sherman's march and nuclear war are apocryphal images for a man with a movie camera, but since they also serve as metaphors for McElwee's romantic failures in the course of the film, their violence is tempered by a self-effacing comedy that some reviewers have compared to Woody Allen's. McElwee's portrayal of himself as an avenging Sherman, a nuclear threat to Southern women, is extravagantly at odds with the candid assessments of his filming that McElwee provides in a series of soliloquies to the camera and in the film's voice-over narration. When McElwee appears early in the film dressed as General Sherman and, alone in the middle of the night, confides *sotto voce* that he has always been fascinated by Sherman, the film-maker explicitly recognizes the possibility that his camera is violating the personal space and the privacy of the women he films. At the same time, the constraints under which McElwee is filming lend his ruminations a casual hilarity. McElwee is in his parents' home, they are asleep, and he cannot raise his voice above a whisper for fear of being discovered, dressed up as Sherman and talking to his own camera. We can take McElwee's metaphors of film-making as vengeance only as seriously as he takes himself. The film strikes a fine balance between McElwee's recognition of the violence that his camera has the power to visit upon others and the embarrassment that his

flesh leaves an unwholesome residue—especially for Veronica, in a nightmare pregnancy that erupts into the vilest obstetrics scene this side of *Humanoids from the Deep.*

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filming causes him.

The brutality of Sherman's devastation of the South is the burden that *Sherman's March* initially takes up and hopes to redeem. McElwee seeks a single female figure who can withstand the metaphysical violence of his filming, a heroine for his film romance. He confronts a series of women, both new acquaintances and old girlfriends, with chronically unresolved relationships, and documents a variety of responses. Jackie turns her back on the camera and refuses to expose her pain; Claudia and Winnie remain ensconced in their utopias; Deedee waits for a husband who can bring the priesthood into her home, and Joy maintains a performer's distance from McElwee and his camera. At last Karen, a lawyer and suffragette, magnificently faces McElwee's camera with her feelings. In perhaps the most unsettling moment in the film, McElwee reaches out from behind the camera to comfort her in her pain. This awkward gesture breaks all the rules of *cinéma vérité* film-making and remains ineffectual: it stands as an admission by the film-maker that putting the camera between himself and these women is an act of violence as well as an act of love, by showing us that it is physically impossible to embrace someone while holding a camera on one's shoulder. Karen must move out of the frame to reciprocate the film-maker's gesture of affection. Charleen, the self-designated spokeswoman for romance in the film, puts the problem succinctly: "This isn't art, Ross. This is life."

If finding a heroine for a film about romantic love in the South proves difficult for McElwee, coming upon a real live hero almost proves disastrous. As an alter ego for the film-maker, General Sherman is conveniently dead, and so McElwee's allusions to his march to the sea remain safely ensconced within the realm of fiction. *Sherman's March* has more trouble integrating into its fiction its encounters with a contemporary figure of larger-than-life masculinity, Burt Reynolds. The film's consideration of Reynolds as an alter ego for the film-maker becomes traumatic precisely because Reynolds is alive, well, and working on location when McElwee visits.

Early in the film a woman named Pat establishes Burt Reynolds as the definitive man of a Southern woman's dreams, the star of *real* movies—unlike McElwee's documentary in which she finds a role for herself. When McElwee meets a Burt Reynolds look-alike, a remarkably nice fellow named Randy, the film appears to have found proof that impersonations are not just possible but inevitable. Its own process of casting the film-maker in the metaphorical roles of Sherman and Reynolds seems happily confirmed. Yet later in the film the appearance of the real Burt Reynolds, who is anything but pleasant when confronted with McElwee's camera, blasts the felicity of the conceit. Reynold's complete disinterest in McElwee's film threatens to become an incorrigible intrusion of reality into the fictions of the film. If this Burt Reynolds is the lover of Southern women's dreams, it seems McElwee and his film have undertaken a hopeless task in seeking to cast a romance in the South.

What redeems McElwee's film from the inhospitableness of Burt Reynolds in the flesh is not McElwee's authority as a film-maker and actor, nor Reynolds's, but the good humor with which Reynolds's female fans maintain their devotion to the star. Laughing about a baby girl kissed by Reynolds, calling her "Burtha," mocking swoons, these women keep alive the fiction of male *machismo*. *Sherman's March* defers to the fiction promulgated by these women as it defers to the fictions of all the women McElwee encounters—in good faith, and with some sense of bafflement.

Ross McElwee's great achievement in *Sherman's March* is his articulation of his wonder at the mystery of the women he encounters. Not unlike the great Hollywood melodramas

of the thirties and forties, *Sherman's March* appreciates these women as performers, creating fantastic communities in a world of violence. The women's performances encompass an awesome range: again and again in the course of the film their fictions outstrip McElwee's. Whether they are modeling dresses, demonstrating cellulite-removal exercises, explaining fanny tucks, make-up techniques, linguistic theories, survival preparations, or political activism—or literally performing, belting out "R-E-S-P-E-C-T" in a parking-lot concert—these women compel McElwee's respect and admiration. The engaging humor and candor of McElwee's monologues in front of his camera derive in part from the admitted meagerness of the film-maker's fictional resources compared to the fictions enacted by the women in the film, fictions that transform even the most mundane occasion. When *Sherman's March* pauses to marvel at Karen simultaneously mopping the floor and talking on the phone, even routine housework becomes the creation of a woman observed by an admiring man.

McElwee pays careful attention to the domestic world of the women in the film, which he appreciates as a fiction in its own right. Early in the film the camera watches two girls as they play house, making up male-female relationships in response to the structure of their dollhouse. *Sherman's March* picks up the cue: later in the film, at an exclusive Southern girls' school, McElwee discovers an architectural structure that symbolizes the very cradle of Southern womanhood, a garden gazebo decorated with seashells. Immaculate, inviting, penetrable, the gazebo represents the women in the film. McElwee asks the girls in the gazebo if he may come in. Although he isn't exactly denied admission, *Sherman's March* makes it clear that the camera's penetration of the gazebo is a violation of its privacy by contrasting the gazebo with the ruins of a church burned by Sherman, in a fire so intense that the coffins exploded in their sarcophagi—another of the film's figures for the destructiveness of McElwee's camera. Just as the Southern women McElwee encounters think of themselves as survivors of Sherman's attack, however, the girls at the finishing school survive the implicit violence of McElwee's filming. They discuss portraiture as they compare class photos: a young woman explains how the imperfections will be airbrushed away from the final prints of the pictures. The image of these Southern women-to-be is perfectible, and they know it.

The peculiar way in which the Southern feminine mystique depends upon an imperfect and often brutal world fascinates McElwee throughout *Sherman's March*. Some possibility of suffering is necessary, even essential, to the transcendence these women regularly enact. In one sequence the training of an attack dog emphasizes the brutality that underwrites Southern feminine virtue. A man who appears to be an intruder lunges at a chained Irish setter, which barks, furiously, until it is foaming at the mouth. Only after this scene has continued for an unpleasantly long time does the man step out of his role as an intruder and the film allow us an explanation: the dog is being trained to accompany Jackie and her roommate when they leave the safety of the South for the terrible danger of life in New York City. Given the way the episode is presented, we cannot help but feel that the worst depravities of the Yankee North could not be more brutal than this training session.

Metaphorically, it is unclear whether the greater danger to McElwee is the man playing the role of intruder, or the dog. As a film-maker, is McElwee playing the role of the mock intruder, and viciously inciting the guardians of Southern feminine virtue to needless distress? or is McElwee's role in the romance he seeks going to parallel that of the trained dog? There is reason to think McElwee is well represented by the dog: regularly, canines in *Sherman's March* serve as the fellows of the film-maker. These dogs are often hound dogs, with distinctly Southern woebegone expressions; and they usually succeed in winning the affection of the women in the film more successfully than McElwee does.

It is a moment of great comic relief when, following his return to Boston, McElwee sides conclusively with the dogs. The film offers us a shot of a sweater-clad dog seating himself resignedly in a puddle of icy water. This dog sitting in a puddle is funny, and not just pathetic, because *Sherman's March* has moved

SHERMAN'S MARCH

to recognize and resolve the contradiction between its capacity to do violence to women and its vision of them as perfectable, if not perfect, creatures. The moment of resolution is an abdication of authority: in Manhattan, McElwee walks up to the St. Gaudens statue of "Victory Leading Sherman," and the camera pans to follow his movement. The pan marks the presence of someone other than McElwee behind the camera. It is the film's achievement of objectivity and the film-maker's admission of surrender, ironically made in front of another work of art that is a monument to Sherman's victory over the South.

Having given away his role as an omniscient observer for the first and only time in the film, McElwee becomes free to position himself as a member of an ordinary audience in the last scenes of the film. Back in Cambridge, he falls in love with his music teacher, and the film ends with McElwee's camera in a pointedly nonprivileged position in the expansive darkness of Symphony Hall during a concert. The camera cannot distinguish his new love as she sings in the chorus, and so at last it frees itself from its burden of violation and guilt.

In rediscovering the limits of a man with a movie camera, McElwee rediscovers the natural subject of documentary film-making —the film-maker, whose claim to exist depends upon his justification of the camera he has placed between himself and the rest of us. At the same time, the fact that *Sherman's March* celebrates McElwee's abdication of authority as the basis for its conclusion ties the film to the great melodramatic fictions of Hollywood, which regularly embraced the limits of cinematic authority as the grounds for their faith in fiction and humanity. McElwee concludes that he is not singlehandedly going to rekindle the possibility of romantic love in the South, and tentatively begins a romance in real life in Boston. Hopeful but unsure of himself as someone other than a film-maker, McElwee reports at the end of *Sherman's March* that he has asked the music teacher to go to a movie the following weekend. He has of course by this point provided the movie himself, and it is a first-rate one.

—ELLEN DRAPER

GRINGO

Director: Lech Kowalski. Story consultant: John Spacely. Cinematographer: Raffi Ferrucci. Composer: Chuck Kentis. Editor: Val Kuklowsky.

It was with a little curiosity and less enthusiasm that I went to see *Gringo,* which had been publicized as a grim exposé of the drug world in New York City's Lower East Side. None of the names connected with the film were familiar to me—unlike that of Paul Morrissey, whose *Mixed Blood,* also set in the Lower East Side drug world, was opening at almost exactly the same time. Whatever one thinks of Morrissey's work, he was likely to offer something more quirky than an exposé. And why the title *Gringo*? Was the film a self-conscious attempt to show the drug world through Hispanic eyes?

Similar doubts may have kept others away from *Gringo,* which at this writing has had only limited release. Yet in seeing the film itself I found remarkable strengths in place of the weaknesses I had feared. Perhaps the film's most unusual strength is its approach to a problem that has been implicit in film-making from the beginning: how to successfully combine documentary scenes with staged narrative.

The central character of *Gringo* is played by—and based on the life of—a California-born white heroin addict who goes by the name of John Spacely. Many of the people around him are Hispanics (and many others are blacks), which accounts for the film's title; but this is ironic, since in this world the first allegiance is to drugs, not ethnicity. The film's narrative consists of little more than Spacely's

SHERMAN'S MARCH

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John Spacely in GRINGO

attempts to raise money for drugs, his taking of drugs, and his interaction with other people in the drug world, including a mugger who takes his skateboard. When he is up, he talks expansively with friends and acquaintances; when down, he is alone and silent.

Interspersed with the narrative scenes are apparently unstaged vignettes of addicts and dealers. At times the narrative and documentary modes overlap. Spacely is seen actually shooting up and, on one occasion, vomiting after he comes down, while the documentary removal of a murder victim's corpse is preceded by the staged shooting of a drug dealer by a rival. In several scenes people talk directly to the camera as if to a TV news team. The entire film was shot on location; except for a brief prelude and coda, every scene was filmed in Alphabet City (Avenues A, B, C and D) at night. Fiction and documentary together present a somber Looking Glass world—a city of crowds turned into shattered shadows, a cast of individuals all sharing an obsession with drugs.

Many films, of course, have mixed staged and documentary scenes with varying success and critical acceptance. Such documentary film-makers as Robert Flaherty and Humphrey Jennings have used staged scenes and an imposed narrative form, while fiction films such as *The Naked City* and *Medium Cool* have made extensive use of documentary scenes. But the blend of fiction and documentary in *Gringo* stands apart because Kowalski reverses their usual relationship. In nearly all mixed films, scenes of reality are inserted to validate the narrative; in *Gringo,* the narrative validates the documentary scenes. By this I mean that the staged elements are established so unmistakably as fiction that the viewer does not have to worry about the authenticity of the documentary scenes. *Gringo* is more than fiction, but it does not try to conceal its fictional framework.

There are various ways in which the staging of events reveals itself in films, and *Gringo* incorporates all of them. The most obvious signs of staging involve internal evidence: in *Gringo,* the stealing of Spacely's skateboard and the shooting of the dealer are actions that, if real, could hardly have been filmed at such close quarters with such well controlled camerawork.

The staging of a scene can often be inferred from controlled camerawork alone. In *Gringo,* there is little display of *cinéma vérité*-style roughness even in the exteriors, despite the difficulties of filming street scenes at night. ("I like to control things," Kowalski told me.) Many of the exterior scenes with Spacely must have required careful preparation of camera movement and lighting: dolly shots that follow him as he runs along streets, or as he skateboards along the pavement and is passed

on both sides by a motorbike gang; above all, a scene in which he plays the harmonica, silhouetted against the headlights of cars (and here the sound is as striking as the image). More subtly but even more unmistakably, staging is signaled by changes in camera setup during what purports to be continuous action. An extensive example occurs in *Gringo* when Spacely visits a woman friend: as they converse, the film cross-cuts between his shooting up and her feeding various pets. The apartment is so cramped that it is hard to imagine two cameras running simultaneously. In fact, Kowalski told me, the sequence took three sessions: first Spacely and the woman improvised their dialogue; then they reenacted it twice while the camera focused on each in turn.

Fiction also asserts itself in the film's structure. The apparently documentary sequences of drug people (without Spacely) are sandwiched throughout between narrative sequences (with Spacely), so that the former never continue uninterrupted for long enough to make viewers forget they are watching a narrative film. In addition, the film has a global structure that becomes apparent only near the end, as the generally casual tempo of the editing gives way to an orchestrated climax. Accompanied by a slow crescendo of incidental music, a series of brief scenes focuses on Spacely shooting up at four or five different times and places. The series builds in intensity until it suddenly leads into a morning-after sequence in which Spacely rolls out of bed and vomits; this in turn modulates into a dream or vision in which Spacely skateboards joyously through the sunlit streets of Lower Manhattan to the sound of a 1950s song, "Since I Don't Have You." The unexpected emergence into clarity throws the rest of the film, with its continual shadows, retrospectively into stark relief. The ending also invokes the brief daylit opening scene of Spacely sitting on the sidewalk with his skateboard, and thus leaves the viewer aware of the film's deliberate shape—a long, somber arch of nocturnal scenes resting on slim piers of light.

In praising Kowalski for highlighting the fictional side of *Gringo* I am not suggesting that makers of fiction films try to pass off their work as reality. (My only experience of viewers mistaking fiction for reality is with the specialized reflexive approach of *David Holzman's Diary,* whose terminal credits were greeted at one showing with Oh's of disappointment.) But many film-makers do try to make mileage out of documentary footage: they frame their narrative within documentary scenes and create as seamless a transition as possible between the two modes. This tactic often fails because the documentary scenes are too exiguous to carry the fictional weight and lack a close enough connection with the narrative scenes (coming as they usually do from library or second-unit footage). Kowalski, by contrast, had a superabundance of documentary footage to choose from, all of it filmed at the same time, in the same locations and under the same conditions as the narrative scenes. This close relationship between the two modes enabled him to expose the artifice of his narrative without splitting his film in two. However, in avoiding the usual error of fictional films he could have fallen into its converse, submerging his narrative in fascinating but digressive documentary scenes. He worked his way around that trap by spending a year on the editing. "There's a great film in the unused footage," he said.

By establishing *Gringo* as fiction, Kowalski avoided another, deeper trap that lies in the way of makers of nonfiction films. Any sign that a scene presented as a documentary record may have been staged will at best distract the viewer; at worst, it may compromise the entire film. Nonfiction films are particularly vulnerable to one of the signs of staging described above: controlled camerawork. A minor example occurs in anthropologist Robert Gardner's *Deep Hearts,* a study of a male dancing display among a people of Niger. As the line of dancers moves irregularly forward and backward, several times an arm swings close to the camera lens—very close indeed, since it is a wide-angle lens that enlarges the apparent distance—and yet neither the camera nor the dancer flinches. Was this luck, precise judgment, one successful shot among others in which the camera was struck—or the outcome of a rehearsal? Even if it was the last, the amount of staging involved would be minimal; but even if the shot was pure seren-

dipity, the possibility of staging puts it under a small cloud.

It takes only a little more evidence of preparation to put a nonfiction film under a much heavier cloud. This is what happens to *Streetwise,* a study of street children in Seattle that appears to capture their lives on the run; yet some scenes must clearly have been reenacted in order to allow changes of camera setup. Two examples involve the same boy. Early in the film he is seen walking "continuously" through a series of panning shots in each of which he starts out behind the camera and ends up ahead of it. Later he goes to a phone booth to order a pizza with a bizarre topping, so that he can retrieve it from the garbage when the pizzeria later throws it out uncollected: again the sequence appears continuous but has inserted close-ups of the boy talking on the phone. Doubt trickles from such scenes to many others. After a youth, busted for selling pot, hangs himself, and his apparently insensitive father stands by the coffin, there is a Coke can on the coffin lid. It seems almost too neat a character stroke to be true, and because the film-makers have plainly controlled some events, viewers may suspect their hand in the Coke can.

Guilt or innocence is not the issue. Although some of the children in *Streetwise* may have acted larger than life for the camera, I have no reason to believe that the film-makers fabricated events. But this does not alter the impression left by the film itself, that it manipulates the viewer while pretending not to.

Though *Gringo* also manipulates the viewer, it does not pretend otherwise. Moreover, the manipulation can be said to enlarge rather than restrict the viewer's response. In explaining the large number of shooting-up scenes in *Gringo,* Kowalski told me that he included them partly to convey some of the squalor—such as the smells—that was beyond the reach of his camera and microphone; but also partly to inure viewers to unpleasant details so that they could eventually see the drug world free from the prejudice of squeamishness.

Kowalski is clearly fascinated by marginal people and practices. Before *Gringo,* he made a film on the Sex Pistols; afterward, he embarked on a film about the Penitentes of New Mexico. Yet *Gringo* does not patronize or apologize for its drug addicts any more than it condemns them. Its lucid insight into the drug world makes the film worth seeing even for people who have no interest in the problem of combining documentary and fiction; at the same time, it is Kowalski's solution to that problem that sustains and intensifies his vision. *Gringo* achieves a remarkable balance between its warm response to people and the cool aesthetic framework in which it presents them.

—WILLIAM JOHNSON

FORGET MOZART

(Vergesst Mozart). **Director: Slavo Luther. Screenplay: Zev Mahler. Photography: Joseph Simocic. Music: W. A. Mozart. Producer: Karel Dirka.**

Just when all the hype about *Amadeus* had subsided, when the entire moviegoing world had had a chance to meet F. Murray Abraham and Tom Hulce and Elizabeth Berridge, and when a cease-fire was achieved between those who considered *Amadeus* a wonderful fantasy and those who deplored it as a biographical falsification, another picture appeared that would inevitably be associated with the Milos Forman/Peter Shaffer/Saul Zaentz superproduction. The moviegoing masses had obviously been ready for one Mozart film; how about two?

Following in the aftermath of a Hollywood-sized hit was not on the minds of those who created *Forget Mozart,* but comparisons are unavoidable. The present reviewer confesses his inability to criticize the one film without reference to the other, and he takes as his starting point the position that *Amadeus* is an entertaining piece with a moment or two of brilliance, but it is flawed by comic-book characterization and disappointing, ultimately, in light of its lofty-aesthetic and theological pretensions (which are not disguised by the film's sardonic flavor).

Forget Mozart (Vergesst Mozart) is a West German-Czechoslovak collaboration shot at the same time and in the same city (Prague), and written by a man (Zev Mahler) who received a minor credit for *Amadeus.* It stars one actor with an established international reputation (Armin Mueller-Stahl) amid an otherwise un-

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familiar cast, and it was directed by a virtually unknown Slovak (Slavo Luther.)

Forget Mozart was produced on a limited budget, and its smallness compared to *Amadeus* leaps out at the viewer right from the opening scene at Mozart's deathbed. Luther's film made its international debut in the late summer of 1985 at the Venice Festival, where it was all but lost amid the glitterati circulating beneath the Mediterranean sun. The following November, the picture was screened at the Chicago Festival, where it captured no headlines but did pick up a silver plaque for Mahler's screenplay.

Forget Mozart is a whodunnit—or, more accurately, a who-might-have-liked-to. Around the composer's corpse are gathered half a dozen people who had been close to him, including, among others, his wife Constanze (Catarina Raacke), his actor-friend Schickaneder (Uwe Ochsenknecht), and the court composer Antonio Salieri (Winfried Glatzeder). Each of the mourners has some reason for wanting to see Mozart dead; the most interesting and complicated motive is that of Constanze, whose life was filled with hardship because of her husband's spending and whose health was damaged, according to this story, by the venereal disease he had given her.

The circumstances of Mozart's death attract Count Pergen (Mueller-Stahl), the chief of secret police. Pergen, suspecting homicide, probes the consciences of his suspects, and it is through their successive points of view that the film flashes back to show us glimpses of the composer's life.

It is Luther's intention, as he has explained it, to show "first and foremost the human being—then the genius." Luther's Mozart, played by a fine young German actor who goes by the single name Tidof, is no less human than Forman's; he is a philanderer, all right, but his amusements carry the same intensity as his work. Tidof's face maintains that intensity throughout the performance. The audience is spared the offensive hyena-laugh of *Amadeus*'s Tom Hulce, and we see a man whose social behavior affords him some pleasure without lowering him to the level of the apes. This Mozart works hard, plays hard; he kicks his dog one minute, pets it tenderly the next. He chases women, but never does he resemble Inspector Clouseau. Because the Tidof Mozart comes across as a more credible human being than the Hulce version, he is also more convincing as a genius.

A similar comparison can be made between the two versions of Constanze. The nineteen-year-old Catarina Raacke shows no particular brilliance in her role, but she seems to have taken it more seriously than *Amadeus*'s Elizabeth Berridge, whose Valley Girl shallowness failed to grow into the tragic depth needed by the film's end. (Berridge inherited the role when Meg Tilly, originally chosen for it, tore her Achilles tendon during rehearsals. Too bad.)

It is more difficult to compare the two Salieri performances, for the roles are vastly different. Salieri is the chief protagonist in *Amadeus,* and it is his singular envy that drives him consciously to destroy Mozart and protect his claim to musical preeminence. In contrast, the Salieri of *Forget Mozart* does not burn with envy, for he knows that his position at the top of the musical world is unassailable. Unlike the court composer in *Amadeus,* he is no ascetic denying his lust in the quest for the divine gift of genius; he enjoys a little fun and even invites Mozart to join him one day for some whoring in the Hofburg.

Winfried Glatzeder's performance in this supporting role is adequate, but it isn't likely to live in our memories. Inevitably, we draw comparisons with the Salieri of *Amadeus.* We recall the hatred and the passion reflected in F. Murray Abraham's countenance as his Salieri cursed the God that made Mozart great—and we find it hard to accept a lesser performance, even in a lesser role.

Still, there is something more plausible, if less exciting, in the Salieri role as Luther and screenwriter Mahler have designed it. Their Salieri didn't kill Mozart by poisoning him or driving him to a fatal paranoia; he killed the man by an accumulation of small mischiefs, by denying him access to fame, by not sufficiently promoting his greatness at the court. Thus guilty, Salieri is culpable to the same extent as the other people gathered to mourn the dead composer. They, too, had failed to support the man in his critical moments; they, too, had shown all the petty human qualities that contributed to his demise—jealousy, suspicion, lack of patience.

In the end, this is the conclusion Count Pergen reaches. As a member of the community and particularly as a law enforcer, even he himself admits some responsibility for having allowed Mozart to die. Realizing that the finger of guilt now points back toward himself, the policeman wraps up his investigation. "Forget Mozart," he tells the others in the film's final line.

Pergen's advice brings the film's metaphorical story to an ironic ending. Mozart the man perished because those around him let him down; with his death, Mozart the genius passed on, too, leaving behind a wonderful legacy of music that will not die. And yet, how much more might the genius have given us—if only the *man* hadn't run up against the human obstacles that devoured so much of his energy and condemned him to an early grave?

Armin Mueller-Stahl plays the role of Pergen with authority. His character assumes the position of a prosecuting attorney examining key suspects as if he really believes a murder has been committed. By the end, he convinces us that guilt lies with all of them—and with none of them.

Director Luther would have us indict ourselves, too. "The film," he has said in an interview with Robert Fischer, "is meant to ask us whether we too are not killing some Mozart today through narrowmindedness and banality, by creating seemingly insignificant difficulties that may, for the person invovled, have catastrophic consequences."

It's an interesting premise, and the idea grows on you. But ideas alone do not sell movies to mass audiences, and no one should have expected *Forget Mozart* to be the hit *Amadeus* was. Its effect on an audience is the opposite of *Amadeus*'s: Luther's film underwhelms you. Lacking the flair of Neville Mariner's conducting, the music on the sound track of *Forget Mozart* plays itself with assurance but without explosiveness—the way many musicologists believe Mozart's music should be played. The visual textures of the film are drab; Prague, where the shooting took place, has many colors to its personality, probably like the Vienna of Mozart's day, but Luther has chosen to show us its grayness in what is, after all, a gray story. Mozart's life, as Luther has reminded us, was no comedy, nor was it in reality the stuff of a great drama; it was a life of hard work, uncertainty, and mixed recognition (the family's financial problems arose not so much from Mozart's being underpaid as from his overspending).

One major factual element, ignored in *Amadeus,* comes through in *Forget Mozart:* the role of the Freemasons. Mozart was a Mason, and wealthy members of the brotherhood at times lent him money. Luther's film shows us that the Freemasons could also be critical of Mozart, as they were upon the public performances of *The Magic Flute;* the opera was inspired by Masonic ideas and can be interpreted as a criticism of Habsburg absolutism, but at least some of Mozart's lodge brothers felt that the opera betrayed the secrets of the lodge. Thus, *The Magic Flute* fired the anger of those it implicitly honored as much as those it implicitly opposed.

On the whole, though, *Forget Mozart* is no less fictional than *Amadeus.* Luther and Mahler's characters, right down to Count Pergen, did in fact exist, but the story is another goulash of biography and fantasy. The police officer's inquisition of those close to the deceased composer is, of course, a pure conjecture; it is unlikely that Pergen in reality ever crossed paths with Mozart or the people around him.

So how are we to judge *Forget Mozart*? The film's title is doubly ironic in light of its timing; it was completed shortly after *Amadeus* and released nearly a year later. It has been overlooked by the major distributors, and that is not likely to change. Both in Europe and in North America, *Forget Mozart* has been relegated, at best, to the status of "that other Mozart movie."

Not that it deserves the level of attention received by *Amadeus.* (But then, did *Amadeus* deserve the level of attention received by *Amadeus*?) Luther's film makes no claim to greatness and would not be a mass-market hit in the absence of *Amadeus.* It is a simple fiction that bears a message worth considering—no more, no less. It deserves neither glory nor obscurity. Its success is the modest success of a film that pretends little. And perhaps—just perhaps—if either of the two "Mozart movies" is remembered a decade and more from now, it may be the one with "Forget" in its title.

—DAVID PAUL

Books

THE CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD CINEMA

Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960

By David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

Not so long ago, "classic" films were the exemplary ones, as in Parker Tyler's *Classics of the Foreign Film.* Now these are the Canonized films, a term shifting emphasis to measurable effect, although old nomenclature survives in advertising copy: David Zinman, *Fifty Grand Movies of the 1960s,* 1970's "the Cinema's Youngest Classics" (Crown, 1986). In some measure, movies that film students watch in classrooms today are titles found to disclose certain critical approaches, movies that can be talked about in particular ways: *Young Mr. Lincoln* or *Stella Dallas* or *How Green Was My Valley.*

By its authors' accounts, Classical Hollywood cinema is something else again. Minimally, it's the typical, the standardized and the standard. Classic = a group style whose formal and stylistic norms may serve (a) to evidence a skilled and accurate performance operating within complex layers of conventions (like a jazz band that plays in tune and knows the right changes but lacks distinguished solos); and (b) to establish a standard against which both deviations and redeployments of the known variables may be charted (like a jazz band that plays substitute changes with imagination).

The tenor of such an argument depends on its attitudes toward the interchangeable cellulose parts, on their stylistic desideratum. One measure of this book's integrity rests on a sincere appreciation for the craft of typical Hollywood product. However predictable, the most anonymous film will operate with astonishing grace within its system of alternative choices and shifting enclosures.

Classical Hollywood Cinema is proposed to extend from 1917 to 1960, the earlier date suggesting an initial confluence of style, production mode and managerial system, 1960 an embattled moment when television and the New Wave were attacking the studio flanks. Sometimes jointly, more often separately, the book's authors sequentially undertake a formal description of Hollywood style; production systems; selected aspects of silent film dating from 1909; a series of essays tracing chronologies of technological change; shifts in production mode between 1930 and 1960; more technology; and a short post-1960 updating (inflected by other factors, the style perseveres). Common to all these phases is a commitment toward functional integration among the subject matters. Production practices, financing, managerial hierarchies and technical innovation are seen as grounding movie product in historical circumstances.

The initial strategy (Bordwell's) is to rationalize a description of Classical Hollywood style is an unbiased sample of one hundred films. Out of a random 841 title selection, these were located among distributors and archives. Of course, films that are preserved or distributed have suffered their own selective processing, but the resulting list might be investigated on other grounds. It appears weighted toward thirties films overall (thirty out of a hundred) and thirties Warner Brothers (thirteen out of thirty). These one hundred typical films include *Applause, The Man Who Laughs, Merry-Go-Round, Mickey, River of No Return, Saratoga, Shall We Dance, The Sin of Howard Diddlebock, Steamboat Bill, Jr.,* and *Wuthering Heights.* The directors number King Vidor, Rouben Mamoulian, William Wellman, Jules Dassin, Fred Zinneman, Douglas Sirk, Joseph Mankiewicz, Maurice Tourneur, Paul Leni, Erich von Stroheim, Frank Capra, W.S. Van Dyke, Otto Preminger, Tod Browning, Preston Sturges, Buster Keaton, Raoul Walsh, John Ford, and William Wyler. In mitigation, it should be noted that examples (of lighting, screen direction, eyeline matches, composition, story design, etc.) drawn from the sample are marked by their typicality. I doubt whether less-known work would have differed much if at all.

Bordwell is disposed toward E.H. Gombrich's *Art and Illusion,* arguing for the predispositions of a viewer (of painting, of film) visually to order ongoing interpretations based on mental sets of prior experience retained as

probabilities. Like Bazin, Gombrich finds most art striving historically toward a simulation of nature, toward "illusion," in Bordwell's terms "realism," concealed artifice, "invisible" storytelling. It's a position basic to much contemporary film study, legitimizing phenomenological readings of narrative (what happens in a story?), of role (how do the sexes treat each other?), and of perception (how does the spectator enter the experience?). Bordwell's employments of "realism" are sophisticated, and he effectively underscores the successful uses of studio technology and dramaturgy to support this particular form of illusion.

Sometimes critical of Gombrich's perception theory (see "Art History and the Partial God" in *Toward a Psychology of Art,* University of California Press, 1966), Rudolf Arnheim argues there that artists are really more concerned with making things come alive than making them appear real. By such measure (and allowing commercial film-makers momentarily to be artists), the reality of a William S. Hart film becomes something different from that of a Roy Rogers. The point is perhaps minor, but it may help to suggest that *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (quite admittedly) operates on a certain necessary level of generalization.

Indeed, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* is noteworthy both for its adherence to self-admitted methodologies and premises and for the diligence of its research. Part II, "The Hollywood Mode of Production to 1930" (Staiger), takes its model from Geoffrey Nowell-Smith: film history immersed in a series of histories, including "economy, technology, politics, ideology/representation, and the unconscious. . . . a terrain of possibilities." Staiger describes a fledgling Hollywood that evolved feasible tensions between standardization and variable pressures of narrative convention, advertising publicity, a developing star system, trade associations, and cyclic changes bred in studio competition. Variations were no less real for their containments. Staiger is particularly effective on the developments of production hierarchies and of work distributions during the twenties.

Thompson's Part III, "The Formulation of the Classical Style, 1909–28," backtracks narrative change to what here becomes pre-classical models (1900–1908). As initially described, Hollywood style emphasizes the idological utilities of compositional centering, depth, balance, and frontality, all serving to reinforce spectator perceptions and comprehensions. Thompson finds many such features wanting in early films. Today's viewer may be hard pressed easily to isolate significant detail from context. She might usefully have noted compensating elements characteristic of early exhibition, such as tinting as it helped to emphasize visual detail. (In its current video run, *The Thief of Bagdad* points up tinting's values, albeit from a later time). The prevalence of lecturers in exhibition halls, sometimes extemporizing running commentaries on screen action, sometimes reading from synopses distributed by the film companies, also supplemented audience comprehension. Charles Musser's emphasis on early film's self-perception as a visual newspaper (see, for example, his movie *Before the Nickelodeon*) is another useful way to remind ourselves of frames of reference which moviegoers brought to the nickeledeon or music hall: news, sports, crime, comics, popular songs. Finally, simultaneous playing areas using cutaway sets (p. 263) were common both to nineteenth-century theater and to some early story films, even vignettes.

By and large, when Bordwell, Thompson and Staiger cite films, their intention is to exemplify the common rather than the unique. An exception is the attention centered on Gregg Toland and on *Citizen Kane,* but the motive here proves otherwise useful: to illustrate degrees of latitude the Classical Style may indulge and where it can tighten the reins. (By the way, the image of Boss Jim Gettys watching Kane's political rally [p. 347] is more a product of laboratory than lens.) For different reasons, often financial or organizational, names like Dreyer, Fellini, Hawks, and Hitchcock appear with some frequency, but in a real sense *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* has solved the historic problem of American film history books: how to get everything in. Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson have not only managed to discuss a huge variety of topics (excepting always the so-called film canons), they have interspersed their text with a fascinating number of topical essays: a history of studio cameras, the evolution of the Society of Motion

Picture Engineers, the development of carbon-arc lighting, evolution of the Moviola. Bordwell's chapter on SMPE's organizational strategies behind the introduction of tungsten lighting tests at the 1928 convention is marvelous. A point well taken emphasizes that panchromatic film and incandescent lighting tests accompanied studio sound; they weren't a consequence.

Obviously, future close readings of this book's evidence will prompt challenges and qualifications. *Film Quarterly* (Winter 1985–86) readers may remember that Barry Salt takes exception to the use of a 1919 diagram from SMPE *Transactions* as evidence of state-of-the-art lighting practice (Diagram 9 in Appendix D, p. 412). Arguments aside, such detail illustrates the degree to which textual detail seeks to ground itself in theoretical constructs throughout. Like its subject, the book will undoubtedly itself establish a a standard against which subsequent research must be measured, an argument that be either amplified or challenged. How this occurs will evidence the character of American film history for the next several years. And of course there still remain those pesky film canons to deal with, potentially with other definitions of reality, of illusion, even of human value. —JOHN FELL

CURRENT RESEARCH IN FILM
Audiences, Economics and Law: Volume I

Edited by Bruce A. Austin. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corp., 1985.

Before film criticism and theory proceeds any further, it should stop, take a deep, patient breath and read the kind of work that Bruce Austin specializes in. His research and writing is, at first glance, a kind of service industry to the industry—data, facts, audience research, and studies of marketing. The nuts and bolts of getting any movie to a theater near you would drive most critics to plumbing metaphors, but Austin's approach to the movies is precisely that of the people who produce, finance and distribute the movies.

Mary Beth Haralovich is the best of the contributors of these twelve investigations into the legal and economic issues of the film industry, as well as its advertising and its audiences. Haralovich's paper, "Film Advertising, the Film Industry, and the Pin-up: The Industry's Accommodations to Social Forces in the 1940s," is a model piece of research into the infamous Howard Hughes *The Outlaw* and its controversial release that made Jane Russell "the only star to become a star before being seen in a picture."

For an intrepid inroad into ties between government and the industry's distribution of American films abroad kudos go to Thomas Guback, whose "Non-Market Factors in the International Distribution of American Films" illustrates how State Department personnel assisted Hollywood in its takeover of the international marketplace in the devastation of local industries following World War II. He attributes American hegemony to a "communications offensive" formalized in the doctrine of "the free flow of information," which still keeps MPAA President Jack Valenti and USIA Director Charles Z. Wick humming.

Guback cites a 1946 letter from Assistant Secretary of State William Clayton to MPAA's Eric Johnston that "the Department took unusual action on behalf of the American industry during the recent loan negotations with Britain" for a $3.75 billion credit, to which he would add two years later that "the motion picture industry received in dollars from Britain about 4% of the entire British loan." Guback concludes, "America's success, therefore, has been built on others' failure—but their failure may have little to do with the intrinsic qualities of their products."

Clearly, the detail and importance of the work in this slim volume is reason enough to read it, but Austin's choices of subjects are also intriguing. His own piece, "The Development and Decline of the Drive-In Movie Theater," follows the curve of popularity of something often celebrated but rarely researched in its entire 50-year history. "*Star Wars:* A Case Study of Motion Picture Marketing" by Olen J. Earnest tracks the making of that film and the issues of marketing such as quick entry and quick exit of product, the inability to predict the competition, ephemeral influences on taste and inclination and so forth in a sober analysis applied to the pioneer of "space'em outs."

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Sometimes sociological research seems to be its own reward, and a few of the chapters tend to conclude the obvious. But even the most corroborative essays come up with good trivia, such as the first study of a movie audience in 1916 by Ray Leroy Short as part of the first known MA thesis on the motion picture industry. The most important thread running through these essays is their illumination of modes of censorship practiced by the film industry itself. Although only one chapter confronts the topic directly, each essay seems to cast light on that sometimes confusing issue.

Perhaps the industry does too much audience research; perhaps what this book exposes is the obstacle course of the Hollywood imagination. For that reason, Austin's books are indispensable reading for anybody who poses as a film reviewer and advises audiences to attend or not to attend on a regular basis. Austin and Co. tell those folks to whom they speak and how they're being manipulated.

—KAREN JAEHNE

THE RISE OF THE CINEMA IN GREAT BRITAIN

By John Barnes. Bishopsgate Press (37 Union Street, London SE1 1SE), 1983. £16.50.

This study is the second volume in Barnes's planned six-volume history of "The Beginnings of Cinema in England 1894–1901" and examines the year of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, 1897. This meticulously researched effort is filled with many valuable nuggets of information. Robert Paul's tripod that could pan and tilt is documented with text and photographs. Since this was developed for filming the Queen's Jubilee in June of that year, it appears to have predated any comparable device in the United States by several months. One wonders if Paul's mechanism (or some imitation) wasn't acquired by the Edison Company for its cameramen's world tour in 1897–8. While usually only hinting at the contrasts between the English industry and the industries in the United States and France, this is among the book's most fruitful uses.

Barnes is a chronicler who feels that the facts speak for themselves and thus offers minimal interpretation and comment. One symptom of his underdeveloped methodology is the fragmentation of the 1894–1901 period into divisions by calendar year when, in fact, other forms of periodization might have proven more valuable. Though not a problem in the first voume, which dealt with a three-year chunk, it becomes more bothersome this time around and could compromise the series as it proceeds. Barnes is also preoccupied with technology and equipment, revealing his background as a collector and as the curator of one of the finest museums of magic lantern and early cinematographic apparatus in the world. The array of technical solutions to the problem of moving film forward through a gate and holding it steady while each frame is exposed or projected onto the screen is astounding but the significance of these differences is not always clear.

In contrast to his exhaustive research on apparatus, there are several important questions which Barnes might have addressed. From an American perspective, the reprinted review of *The Corbett-Fitzsimmon Fight,* as shown in London on opening night, was useful documentation of American penetration of the British market, yet Barnes fails to inform us of the length of the run and the pattern of exhibition outside of London. Did women in England flock to these films in England as they did in the United States? Who was responsible for the film's marketing in England? While Barnes exhaustively researched the pertinent trade publications, such as *The Era* and *The Optical Magic Lantern Journal,* he usually ignores the daily or weekly newspaper advertisements and reviews of exhibitions—something that might have enhanced and broadened his perspective.

If the above reservations amount to more than mere quibbles, they do not negate the fact that Barnes has written a book that is essential reading for anyone seriously interested in early cinema or motion picture technology. While a book for specialists, *The Rise of the Cinema in Great Britain* is a labor of love that will intrigue any cineaste with eclectic tastes. The book is extensively illustrated with good quality photographs, and is tastefully designed and printed. Unfortunately the book lacks an American distributor and must be purchased directly from its English publisher. —CHARLES MUSSER

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Correspondence and Controversy

"Social" Studies or I Left My Avant-Garde in San Francisco

Considering his position as a teacher at the San Francisco Art Institute, and program director of that same city's Cinematheque, it's hardly surprising that Steve Anker should find fault with *Film: The Front Line 1984* (*Film Quarterly,* Summer 1986); the chief one being "Ehrenstein's . . . unflinching willingness to accept so many fashionable prejudices" concerning the supposed state of avant-garde film today. But if critical differences—to borrow a phrase from Joe Orton—are to teeter on the edge of fashion, Anker would do well to look to the cut of his own biases.

To begin with, there's Anker's insistence—so fashionable among today's rising young neo-conservatives—on separating aesthetics from politics. Moving into the forefront of such trends Anker does the acolytes of *The New Criterion* one better by reducing politics to the level of the "social." In this fashion he's free to praise *F:TFL '84* for its "lucid account of [Jack] Smith's aesthetics," and ignore the heated battles that raged 'round those aesthetics (recounted in some detail in *F:TFL '84*). "His more ephemeral and difficult works remain largely ignored," says Anker of Smith's shifting fortunes, as if some unaccountable modulation in the public's fancy were involved rather than concerted exclusionary campaign that actually transpired. Such scrupulousness in avoiding "social" issues likewise colors Anker's characterization of the book's Owen Land chapter, misrepresented by Anker as dealing with a film-maker who "continually places the viewer in an ambiguous position." As the chapter's *first sentence* makes plain, Land is not the subject at all, but rather the critical matrix of the avant-garde and the image it has constructed out of Land.

Anker's myopia (a favorite term of his in characterizing much of *F:TFL '84*) logically continues in his remarks regarding the Dekeukeleire debate. To Anker the problem pivots on the book's "misunderstanding of the nature of art history." An overt hostility to the "nature of art history" would be more accurate view of the book's discussion of Dekeukeleire and other film-makers (particularly David Brooks) to even the most casual reader. But recognizing this fact clearly upsets Anker's sense of "social" decorum. Advancing one of traditional cultural history's most sacred tenets—progress—Anker declares Dekeukeleire an artist sublimely "unaware" of his means and ends. "We are now simply in a better position to appreciate what he was doing fifty years ago," Anker says. Yes, they were all just a gaggle of idiot-savants back in the twenties, weren't they? Fortunately Richard Abel's *French Cinema: The First Wave 1915–1929* has come along to dispel such notions, providing detailed information about the ciné-club era that spawned Dekeukeleire and many others. Like Hoberman before him, Anker ignores the fact that *F:TFL '84* passes no critical judgment on Dekeukeleire whatever, and goes on to promulgate the accepted avant-establishment line on the Belgian film-maker—an artist for his first four "avant-garde" films, and a cultural nobody for the *seventy-nine* non-"avant-garde" films he made afterwards—"avant-garde" in this context signifying nothing more than a clutch of stylistic tics and effects, a cultural dead end.

Of course, so much as mentioning the notion of critical "lines" brings upset to Anker. "There is no 'current structural preoccupation'," he insists—even while suggesting that arch-structuralist Ernie Gehr (a film-maker in need of critical attention as badly as Bob Hope is in need of real estate) would be a more suitable subject of study for *F:TFL '84* than Warren Sonbert! The book's view of the co-op avant-garde as a ghetto is likewise anathema to Anker, as its denizens "have no comfortable sense of family or community." Yes, it was all sweet-spirited *bonhomie* back in Warsaw in the thirties!

But make no mistake, this lack of cultural cohesion shouldn't ever be said to suggest a sense of "creative crisis" in the co-op avant-garde, Anker is quick to insist. Perish the thought! And shame on *F:TFL '84* for suggesting that Amos Poe's and Bette Gordon's moves away from co-opland heralds any lessening in a-g activity. Their decision to "migrate to the spotlight of mainstream cinema should be seen simply as a career move," says Anker blithely. Sure—just like Dekeukeleire.

Talk of critical "party lines" upsets Anker no end. Yet he's not above laying down the law himself. "All the film-makers discussed by Ehrenstein are in some way involved with issues of narrative, an obviously biased and senseless criterion for determining that they belong on the 'cutting edge' of film," he states. But as *F:TFL '84* spends many pages explaining, it is clearly the insistence on *non*-narrative that is the "obviously biased and senseless criterion" that's crippling avant-garde film practice in this country. Narrative considerations weren't blackballed from

the scene until well into the mid-seventies with the rise of "structural" film. In its wake, opposition to narrative became synonymous with film practice that was to be officially recognized as "avant-garde." Non-narrative stylistics rapidly became standard operating procedure in the co-op movement—leading to films as rigidly normative as Hollywood's. In search of filmmaking strategies worthy of the name "avant-garde," *F:TFL '84* turned its attention to Europe. Its coverage of the works of Ruíz, Schroeter, and Garrel gets a pat on the head from Anker. But as always with the avant-establishment, avant-garde practice is seen as a primarily American phenomenon. Europe may offer its diversions, but the real McCoy is home-grown. And with Anker—upping the ante again—the avant-garde isn't just America anymore, it's San Francisco!

From his twin perches at the Art Institute and the Cinematheque, Anker's clearly the master of all he surveys in SF, "long considered one of the bastions of the co-op movement." Doubtless San Francisco was the site of the Bruce Conner brouhaha Anker mentions. Guess we're just less sensitive to those things out here in the boonies. No wonder Anker's so testy about Warren Sonbert—declaring him "predictable," decrying his Whitney retrospective. Imagine—daring to do a thing like that *out of town!* Not that Anker blows his own horn *too* loudly. In fact, he's quick to slap a mute on it *vis-à-vis* his allegation of "sloppy detail" in *F:TFL '84* regarding Jack Smith. "Jack Smith never appeared in San Francisco in 1981," Anker states with ringing certitude. The "detail" in question involves the Smith title *Lucky Landlordism of Lobster Lagoon,* culled (for literary rather than filmographic reference purposes) from a program note written for . . . the San Francisco Cinematheque! Didn't the show go on as planned? A case of false advertising? Anker—coy aesthete that he is—isn't saying. But then this all comes under the heading of the "social," doesn't it?

For all his knowledge of the scene, Anker's San Francisco perspective does tend to cloud his view of avant-garde activity a bit. Hollis Frampton and Stan Brakhage in eclipse? That's what Anker claims on the basis of the fact that in SF "five years elapsed (between 1980 and 1984) during which time no Frampton was shown publicly." Are we to take it that the Tut-sized tour of Framptoniana currently making the rounds has elected to bypass that "cutting edge" by the Bay? As for Brakhage's supposed "obscurity" (*Unconscious London Strata* laid an egg in SF apparently), this most praised and pampered of avant-maestros can't be said to have sunk beneath the surface for want of support from the co-op crowd. Who can forget Marjorie Keller's breathless call-to-arms in her review of *Murder Psalm* (*FQ,* Spring '84)? "America's premier avant-garde filmmaker, Stan Brakhage, has come under attack." Merciful heavens! Run for your lives! Pull the wagons into a circle!

Keller's upset stemmed from an SF appearance by Jonathan Rosenbaum (whose failure to worship Brakhage as a God has always been a sore point with the co-op set), and a "Brakhage Dance Party" sponsored by a group called "Emergency Filmmakers." "Brakhage's silent films were shown as a kind of light show accompanied by rock and roll music," Keller noted with distaste, identifying the offending group as "an organization which came into being in opposition to the San Francisco Cinematheque."

A rebellion in the ranks? Oh dear. According to Anker, rumors of co-op decline are part of the "ludicrous and persistent myths" books like *F:TFL '84* are prey to. But it's clear from his review that some sort of crisis is afoot, what with his indictment of *F:TFL '84* for shirking its duty—not telling all those wonderful people out there about the boundless glories of co-opland. As Anker should be well aware, the *Front Line* series was designed to reflect many different points of view on avant-garde film. If he should choose to do so he's more than welcome to jump in with a volume of his own explaining why we should all take the likes of Janis Crystal Lipzin, Willie Varela, Vincent Grenier, et al. more seriously. What Anker won't be able to do, however, is satisfy the co-op rank and file.

You can hear their voices bleating from auditorium stages at screening after screening. You can read their bitter words spilling across the pages of journals like *Spiral.* They've done what they were told. They've made their films according to the approved recipies for the "personal" and the "non-narrative." They've put their titles in catalogues for rental. They've trundled along to all the accepted screening venues, and weathered countless pointless Q & A sessions. But what have they got to show for it? Where oh where is the critical white knight—the Mekas, the Sitney, the Michelson—who'll sweep them away to that wonderful world of "serious recognition" (i.e., blatant flackery with attendant ego gratification)? It's not too much to ask. All they want is a piece of the pie that Brakhage, Snow, Frampton, Sharits and the others have munched on. But the avant-establishment's dance card is full. They've got all the geniuses they need at the moment, thank you.

No, Anker is right, there's no "creative crisis" in the co-op avant-garde—it's simply over, done with, *dead.* Film-makers of talent may still move about within it, but as a whole, little relating to its artistic practices, or presentational methods is worthy of the name "avant-garde." For a real avant-garde we must begin to look elsewhere—beyond the co-op, beyond academia, beyond San Francisco.

—DAVID EHRENSTEIN

Steve Anker replies:—

David Ehrenstein only reinforces the misconceptions and closed-minded generalizations already promoted in his volume of *The Front Line.* Ehrenstein goes right for the jugular in labelling me a "neoconservative," and as with so many of his attacks, this diver-

sionary mudslinging tactic is a warped inversion of the truth. I never gave any indication in my review of an insistence on separating aesthetics from politics—perhaps Ehrenstein flashes red whenever be sniffs out any of that old-time purism. I do believe that, in this time of cultural retrenchment, art along with other forms of individual expression has come under attack as self-indulgent and invalid unless its relevance and topicality is immediately apparent. I am very interested in understanding the political framework within which art exists, and in those works which successfully deal with political or social issues. But Ehrenstein makes political context the sole criterion for examining a film's "cutting edge," and I insist that this is just one possible dimension worth considering.

Ehrenstein's preocccupation with the political (I still prefer "social" in most of the examples he cites) forms the basis for all his arguments. I concentrated on his discussion of Jack Smith's aesthetics (description/interpretations of films and performances) because it is far more substantial than the gossipy conjecturing of what Jonas Mekas was doing in some hotel room during the 1964 Knokke Festival. Perceiving Smith's neglect as the result of some "concerted exclusionary campaign" is a highly subjective (if not downright paranoid) understanding of a more complicated truth—that Smith consistently places himself beyond the reach of critical and public appraisal. He manages this by making his work only sporadically available, and pressing most people past their points of endurance—few critics have J. Hoberman's dogged persistence in pursuing Smith for more than 20 years. The paradox Smith embodies is part of what continues to make him such a unique and influential figure: that while his vision is seductive and compelling, he remains largely unavailable, thus defying the system.

Please excuse my "coy" deception in not mentioning the venue where Jack Smith cancelled in 1981. Where else could it have been? In fact, Smith just chose to cancel again in December of 1986—I guess this makes us part of the exclusionary campaign. Despite Ehrenstein's feeble attempt to ridicule the Cinematheque, "false advertising" could better be seen as taking the necessary risk if we are ever to see him out there—programming Jack Smith means accepting the possibility that he would cancel. And the reason for Smith's last-minute cancellation? He is tired of the usual one-night (or in our case four-night) stand, with accompanying low pay. I don't blame him, at this stage of his career. Perhaps Ehrenstein can clue us in as to which "avant-establishment" organizations are getting all that Exxon and Chase Manhattan Bank money he refers to in his book—we sure could use some of it.

As for the Dekeukeliere debate, Ehrenstein again makes erroneous assumptions. I have only seen the four "hot-house" films and so made no comment on his subsequent work. But if those later films are little more than the conventional commercial products Kristin Thompson sampled, Dekeukeliere simply shifted gears into another mode of production. Regardless of his reasons for changing, these films should be judged on their own merits, which don't necessarily have anything to do with art at all. Ehrenstein similarly misrepresents my idea of art history. The point is that the history of art is a constantly metamorphosing universe in which the past coexists with the present, and in which the perspective of time can (and often does) offer new insights into older work—progress has nothing to do with it.

Ehrenstein projects dogma on my part when he goes into the now-familiar rant of how "insistence on non-narrative" is "crippling avant garde practice in this country today." What country is he living in? Most "experimental" film-makers I know have dealt increasingly with narrative and political issues in their recent work (although not in the same say as, say, Jim Jarmusch or Lizzie Borden). And during the so-called era of high structuralism, what were the likes of George Kuchar, Bruce Conner, Chick Strand, Robert Nelson, Kenneth Anger, Bruce Baillie, and many more doing? Sitting on their hands? It all depends on whom you were listening to.

I have no problem in accepting the cutting-edge status of Su Friedrich, Leslie Thornton, or for that matter the film-makers in his book who work with narrative elements in a formally challenging and dynamic way. It is the reverse chauvinism which I object to, the creation of a new and by now quite ascendant orthodoxy. This is why I singled out Ernie Gehr in contrast with Warren Sonbert who, like all the film-makers mentioned in *F:TFL 1984,* has also received his fair share of the very tiny critical pie. Despite the fact that Gehr is considered an "arch-structuralist" (an inept and cliched characterization) and therefore by implication part of some reactionary art movement, Gehr has not simply repeated the same old formula again and again. He has continued to expand and enrich his personal orientation to the medium. At first glance his recent films may seem merely formal and politically irrelevant, that is, not obviously referential, but *Untitled* (1981) and *Signal—Germany on the Air* (1985) deal critically with cultures he understands intimately. To my mind it is Gehr who is bucking the system.

The "co-op avant-garde" (meaning small-scale films made and financed by private individuals and distributed by themselves or through cooperatives) Ehrenstein repeatedly attacks is far from dead, and for good reason. This approach still offers film-makers the greatest freedom of expression and most direct contact with an audience. It is still small venues like the Cinematheque which risk showing challenging films of all kinds, regardless of their obscurity and lack of hype or validation—and it *has* been the Cinematheque which has shown the films of Schroeter, Ruíz, Potter in San Francisco—he obviously has little understanding of what we actually do. Every year hundreds of new films are completed, many of which are of high quality and deserve repeated screenings and serious critical discussion. I can understand why Ehrenstein is intimidated by this

prospect—keeping informed is an exhausting and ongoing process.

Another pat assumption is that there is a "co-op look," as if there were *ever* an official or "rigidly normative" avant-garde. Abigail Child, Dan Barnett, Gunvor Nelson, or Saul Levine are by no stretch of the imagination normative. They are producing some of the most challenging and original films in the world today. Is Ehrenstein's antidote to what is "crippling avant-garde film practice in this country" insipid and reactionary new narratives such as Bette Gordon's recent segment (the aptly named "Greed") of *The Seven Deadly Sins*? Again, narrative isn't the issue here. It's the force and conviction of a filmmaker in challenging his or her audience.

Nowhere in my review do I "blow my own horn" or suggest that the avant-garde *is* San Francisco. I *am* proud of the fact that we have managed to help keep the Bay Area open to the kind of film he would prefer to sweep under the rug, making it part of a broad film activity which includes regular screenings of the entire range of independent film and video. San Francisco is not the provincial back-water town he thinks it is. Nor do I sit perched on high, "master" of all I survey—nothing could be further from the truth. On the contrary, I am constantly searching for films which have recently been completed or which may never have come to my attention (and with the "co-op crowd," it's a sure bet that some of the most interesting films will be made by some of the least self-promoting people). Rather than the wholesale dismissal which Ehrenstein advocates, my "San Francisco perspective" is a product of regular contacts with film-makers and programmers from around the country, and on a recent trip to Europe I saw several hours of co-op work in London, Paris, Vienna and Budapest—mostly by young people who obviously don't know any better. Ehrenstein just doesn't have the time or interest to venture into virgin territory.

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Amos Gutman's ***Drifting*** is the first Israeli film to exclusively focus on male homosexuality and the gay milieu. The Hebrew title *Nagooa* (contaminated) calls attention not only to the stigma attached to being gay, but also to the self-destructiveness of the would-be film-makers, Robby (Jonathan Segal). A self-reflexive film, *Drifting* begins with Robby's direct-address monologue to the camera in which he speaks of his need to make a film. *Drifting,* therefore, continues the romantic tradition of laments concerning creative block or artistic paralysis in production. Robby also recounts the financial obstacles confronting a film-maker living on the margins of a society hostile to deviations. The anti-hero's alienation from Israeli mainstream society is reflected in his relationships to his family and especially to the disdainful grandmother with whom he lives. Most of the film takes place in the apartment, a visual strategy that reinforces the sense of isolation. Although Robby finds Israeli political and cultural struggles irrelevant, he is nevertheless caught up in them. Certain men he brings home are on the margins not only because of homosexuality: the oriental Jew, Ezri, a highschool dropout who becomes a male prostitute, and two Palestinian "terrorists" who find refuge in his apartment. The film's narrative leaves ambiguous the Palestinian's rationale for having sex with Robby, but the possibility of prostitution for survival is intimated. The display of a certain sympathy for the oriental Jew and the Palestinian men, however, is undermined by a misogynistic portrayal of women. At the same time, the narcissism of *Drifting* is not without self-mockery. Early in the film, for example, Robby recounts his daydream: living in Beverly Hills with his lover, Ilan, and receiving the Oscar for the first Jewish gay film. Gutman's own non-Hollywood film, however, ends with Robby's voice-over explaining what the film is about: "It is about what still has to be done and the need to make this film." In *Drifting* (not unlike *8½*) Robby's failure to even begin his film ends in the realization of Gutman's film. —ELLA SHOHAT

The Good Fight. Rejected by American labor, coopted by the New Deal, and bushwhacked by the Comintern, the Communist Party of America is coming back strong, at least on film. *The Good Fight* is the latest, and one of the best, of the current wave of red-diaper docs—sympathetic chronicles of the radical left, typically set in its Depression-fueled heyday in the 1930s, by partisan young film-makers blessed with seasoned raconteurs and government funding. Directed by Noel Buckner, Mary Dore, and Sam Sills, and bluntly narrated by the gravel-voiced Studs Terkel, this record of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War is a solid, if structurally familiar, job of historical excavation: archival footage, family photos, and period music cross-cut with the testimony of genial old "witnesses." On the other wing, however, like much New Left archaeology, the directorial digging is careful to keep the family skeletons buried: none of the Orwellian disillusionment of *Homage to Catalonia* need apply here. If these films are only as good as their witnesses, then *The Good Fight* has been well-served by the eleven still-true believers whose stories typify the ideological commitment and battle-scarred experiences of the 3200 Americans who volunteered to fight Franco and his Fascist allies in 1936. In terms of pure cinematic presence, the standout is Bill Bailey, a crusty incarnation of the down-to-earth old leftie. Coupled with his star-making turn in *Seeing Reds,* Bailey seems bound for glorification as a communist celluloid hero. The role of women and blacks is dutifully acknowledged, most memorably through the testimony of ambulance driver Evelyn Hutchins and nurse Salaria Kea O'Reilly. When Reilly's present-day presence is juxtaposed with her documentary appearance in Frontier Film's *Heart of Spain* (1936), the continuity of the volunteers' commitment is jarringly manifested. Similarly, its cost is realized when pianist Ed Balchowsky rousingly accompanies himself on some old war songs—revealing, only in his last appearance, a lost arm. The archival footage is amazingly clean and, although some of the same territory and anecdotes were gone over in the earlier (and inferior) *Seeing Reds,* the directors have generally avoided recycling newsreel stand-bys for original material unfamiliar even to dedicated documentary buffs. Inevitably, much of the historical stage-setting has the depth of a Survey of Western Civ lecture on the Renaissance, but project historian David Paskin reins in the generic impulse towards deck-stacking with a good deal of success. The selection of illustrative footage for the isolationist ditty "Keep It Over There" provides an economical and credible background for American anti-interventionist sentiment in the thirties. Liberal sympathy for the Republican cause is best recalled via Henry Fonda's impassioned peroration in *Blockade* (1938), a truly dreadful example of Warner Brothers social consciousness. Throughout, the old soldiers put a human face on party-line historiography: Abe Osheroff cheerfully remembers how the boys and he sassed the earnest exhortations of their political officiers and Milt Wolff, 23-year-old commander of the Lincoln Brigade, was not the only young volunteer whose first thought after enlistment was how to break the news to Mom. Unfortunately, like *Seeing Reds, The Good Fight* can't resist stroking its target audience (and itself) with a self-satisfied coda. Modern-day clips of anti-nuke and anti-Reagan protests seemingly complete a spiritual transferral as the torch of political conscience is taken by a vigorous new generation of idealists—the kind of people, in fact, who can be counted on to give like-minded documentaries a warm reception. "I hope my generation has the courage yours had," gushes a wide-eyed youngster bathing in the reflected glow of a Lincoln veteran. Documentary film-makers should not be so deferential.—THOMAS DOHERTY

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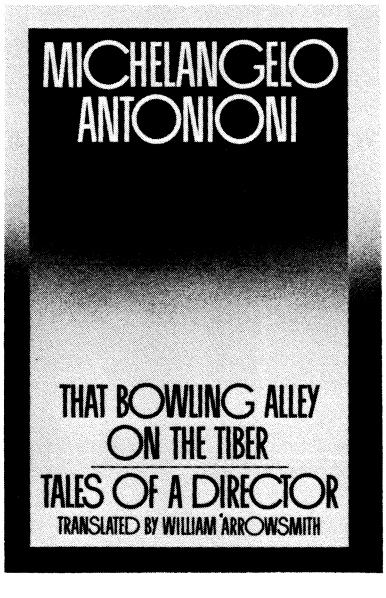

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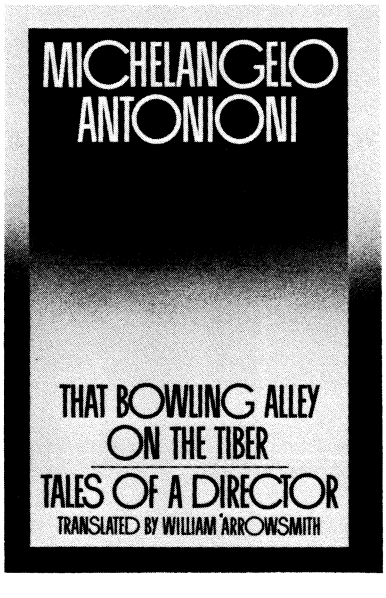

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everything from the complex treatment of Mrs. Bates to the deft, bloody humor delivers the right punch at the right time, with the camera in the right place and the actors on their toes. How would Norman Bates have directed the final installment of *Psycho*? How would *he,* of all people, have used the camera? Imagine the feel for *mise-en-scène,* even the attitude toward emulsion itself, of a compulsive taxidermist; the cutting sense of a schizophrenic; the long takes of the voyeur. *Psycho III* is not that movie, just as Anthony Perkins is not Norman Bates and neither Quixote nor Cide Hamete nor Pierre Menard is the author of *Don Quixote.* Yet Perkins has long been identified in the public mind with Bates, and it is in this sequel that the artist in Norman, the skilled sewer-up of the dead, struggling to control the terms of the creation that controls him (in one sense, Mother; in the other, *Psycho*), is foregrounded to the point of reflexivity. We are encouraged, to some extent, to read Perkins as Bates, and even if we were not, surely Perkins—or anyone who considers adding a new wing to a landmark mansion—must dance to the anxiety of influence. In this film the real Mrs. Bates is Hitchcock, and there are moments when Norman speaks in his own voice and others when he carries on quite perfectly in that of his mother. —BRUCE KAWIN

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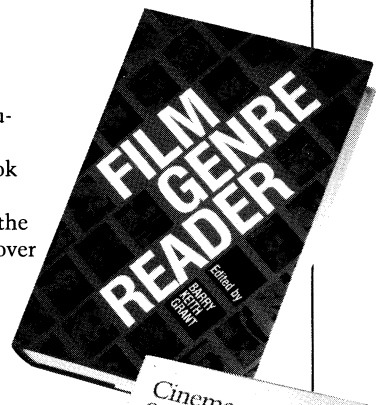

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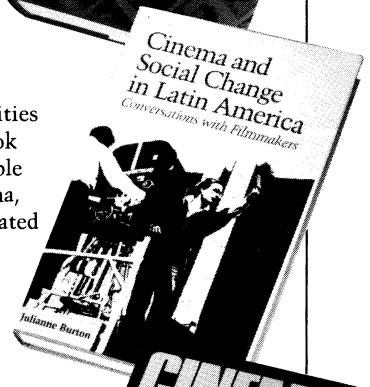

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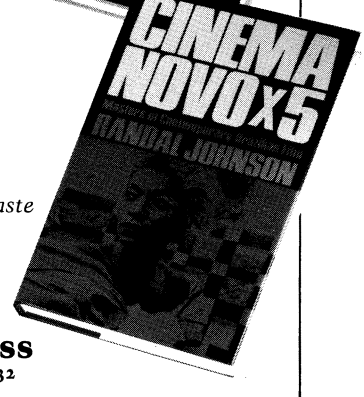

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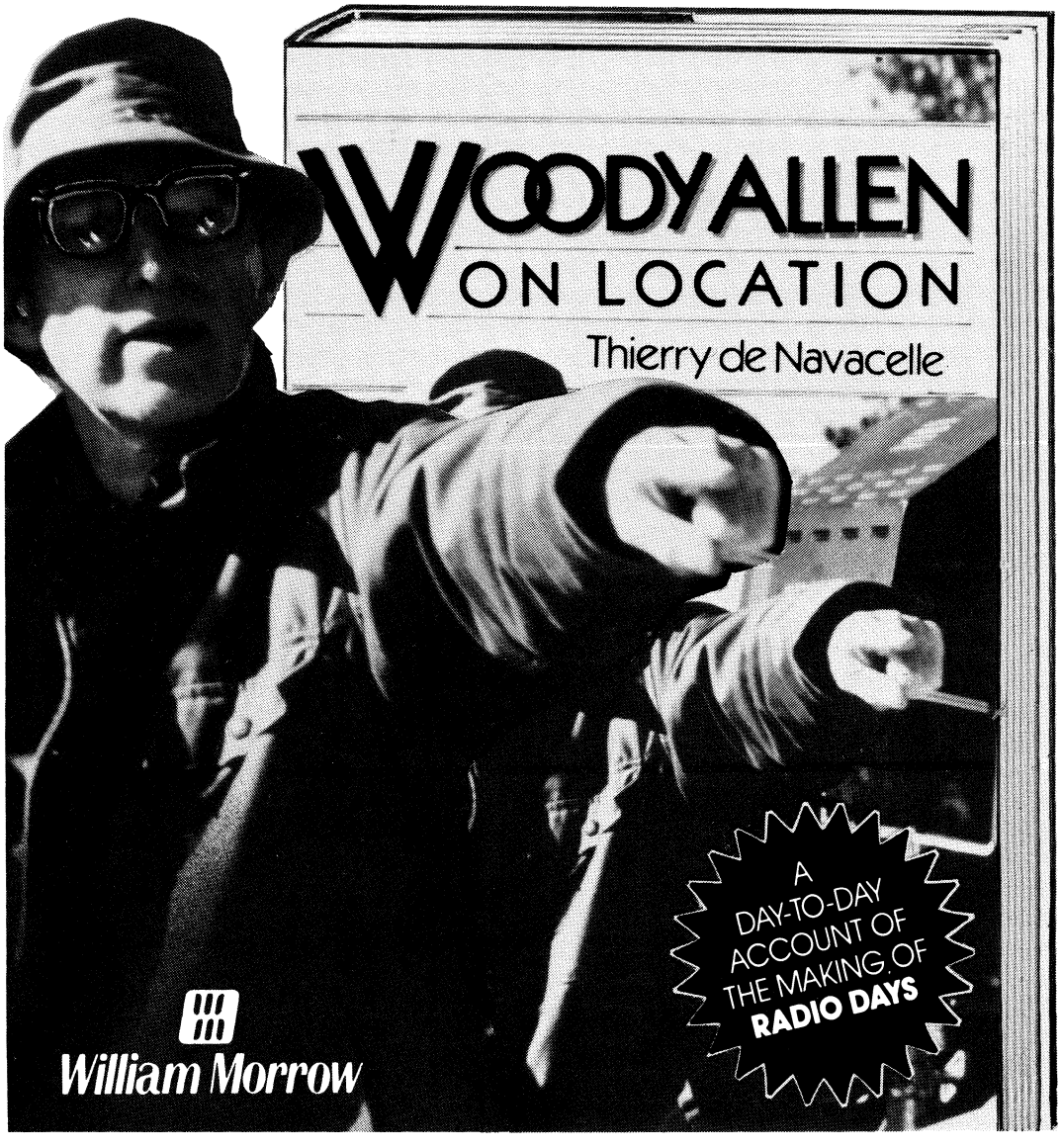

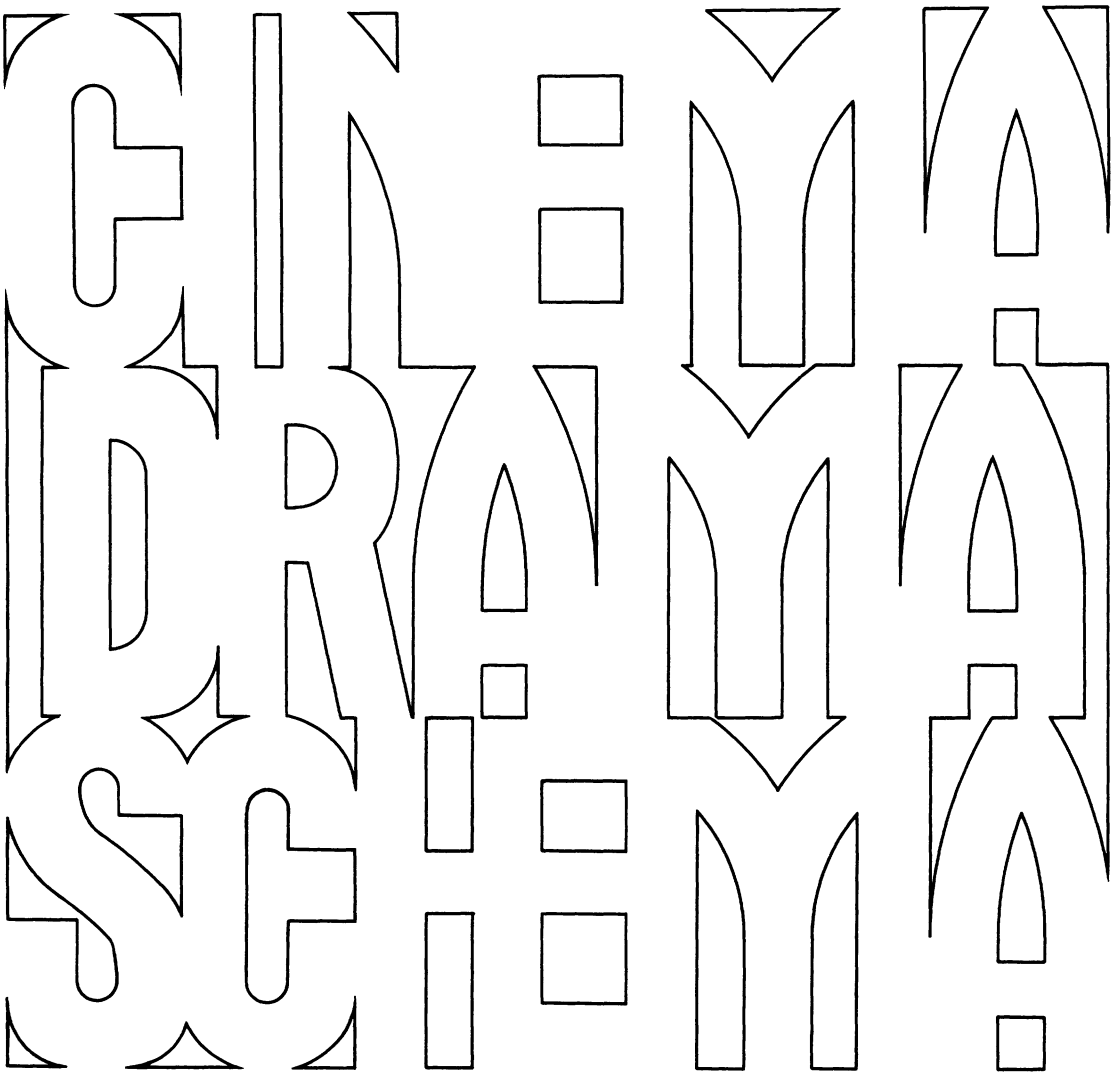

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